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SPACEWAY

June,
1969

SCIENCE FICTION

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BATTLE OF WIZARDS

by L. Ron Hubbard

THE ALIEN

by H. J. Campbell

THE NOVA INCIDENT

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RADIO MINDS OF MARS

by Ralph M. Farley





APPROACHING JUPITER V
(MORRIS SCOTT DOLLENS)

SPACEWAY

SCIENCE FICTION

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PLAUSIBLE SCIENCE FICTION

Portions of a letter we received from a Pennsylvania fan in regard to our editorial, "Curbs on Science Fiction" in the last issue of *SPACE-WAY*, has inspired this follow-up. The letter reads:

"You must listen to scientists and not contradict them too much or your stories will be pure fantasy.

"One common error found in many of the old interplanetary yarns was a scene in which beings (all humanoid) from, say Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Neptune and Pluto were all in the same room—with nobody wearing as much as a spacesuit. Temperature differences alone would make such things impossible.

"Assuming that the conditions were those in which a Terran could survive, the Jovians would be bouncing all over the place, the Martians would be crushed by gravity, the Plutonians melting, etc.

"You still can not convince me that life could exist on Mercury. Even though it does revolve, the temperature difference between day and night would kill about anything.

"Please let's not have men on the moon, the asteroids, the moons of Jupiter and other such places." (We assume that the gentlemen means "unprotected" men—since we are undoubtedly going to have men on many of these places soon!)

Obviously the writer of the letter has given a great deal of thought to these matters and he feels that his intelligence is being insulted when he reads a story that violates certain rules. With a great many stories, his points are well-taken, and one must be able to have his intelligence insulted in order to be able to read them at all.

However, there is a wide variation in stories of this type. . . . The author who sets his **unprotected** earthman down on, let's say Ganymede, and proceeds to spin his yarn with no further explanation as to how he is able to exist there—is guilty of pure fantasy. But the author who explains that, while the atmosphere is thin, its high oxygen content—particularly at the bottom of the huge rift in which he has landed—enables his earthman to breathe, and that the radioactive heat from the planet's crust has raised the temperature enough to prevent his freezing to death is writing science fiction.

It may not be true but, in the light of our present knowledge of Ganymede, it can not be disproved, either. Of course, hot springs could be substituted for the radioactivity. Perhaps other factors as well. The point being that the mind no longer rejects the idea of an earthman dashing about unprotected in what must be a thin atmosphere at best and a temperature which we are pretty sure is several hundred degrees below zero. Instead—if we are interested in this type of science-fiction at all—we find ourselves thinking how clever the writer is in making us believe that perhaps earthmen **could** survive on Ganymede! The same factors can, of course, be extended to any other body in space.

If the writer is dealing only with life native to the planet or satellite he's writing about, the situation can be covered with greater ease. It certainly is not difficult to envision other life-sustaining process than our own. For instance, it is now generally conceded by scientists that

life originally began on earth in an atmosphere which was completely oxygen free. Also, why couldn't there be a life-form which could obtain oxygen from the rocks and soil through its pedal extremities? Is such a system likely to be much more complicated than gills for extracting it from water? Such a creature could also have an outer covering which completely insulated it from heat or cold. In this case, neither atmosphere nor temperature—within reason—would effect it. Thus, as you can readily see, life can exist anywhere—but either conditions must be right for it, or it must be right for the conditions. However, for a story to be believable the author must explain how and why it exists.

It is a commonly accepted fact that our moon has little or no atmosphere. The reason most generally given for this is that its gravity is too weak to prevent the escape into space of the constantly moving molecules of gas. Aside from the fact that gas molecules move slower at lower temperatures and do not move at all at absolute zero, there can be no question of the correctness of this theory. Yet a Spanish astronomer, J. Comas Sola of Barcelona, has repeatedly observed and photographed three small asteroids (25-50 miles diameter), Elsa, Oceana and Jocasta, with haloes*—presumably (what else?) of atmosphere. Normally planetary bodies this small could not retain any atmosphere—at least at any temperature above about 25 degrees Kelvin. Yet these three seem to have enough that it can be photographed—and that's a great deal! Since gravity is a product of size and density, the phenomena might be explained by assuming that these little bodies had densities perhaps a thousand times that of water—except, of course, that such densities would long since have been detected by our astronomers. Thus, either Mr. Sola and his photographs do not tell the truth or we are dealing with an exception for which we do not presently have a reasonable explanation. Certainly if one "exception" is possible, others are, also. Since there can be no limitation to the number of exceptions which may occur, it is rather difficult to see how anyone can say with pedantic certainty that some such "exception" does not exist which will permit life-as-we-know-it on any particular planet, satellite or asteroid in the solar system. By using such an "exception" a writer can construct a plausible story—provided he explains the why and how. (We are not contending that a good story cannot be written without plausibility. One of the most popular fantasy series of all time—Edgar Rice Burroughs' John Carter episodes—is not, strictly speaking, science fiction.)

The planet Mercury is mentioned as a place where life could not possibly be found. However, if the new discoveries regarding this little world hold up, it is highly probable that some sort of carbon-based life may be found in the polar regions where the temperature changes would not be unreasonable. If it had managed to get its start when the atmosphere was denser, it could adapt to thinner air. Incidentally, from the viewpoint of the possibilities of there being life on this planet, the important part of the new findings is not the rotation but the temperature readings of the night side. At any rate, it is certain that some day we will establish our bases in the polar regions. It will be fascinating to see what and how much protection they will require...

Anyway, let's not put unreasonable limitations on our science fiction writers. Let's just insist that they make their stories plausible.

* "Watchers of the Skies," Willy Ley, page 336.





The ALIEN

A NOVELET

By H. J. CAMPBELL

Q The aliens had laid their plans carefully. How were they to know that the empty tanks of the abandoned space ship had contained water—or that there was no such thing as dimolecular hydrogen peroxide in the Solar System?

ILLUSTRATED BY ROY HUNT

YOU see her as soon as you open the cabin door, and she looks quite dead. So you slip inside and close the door behind you. The other cabins along the corridor of the drifting spaceship can wait. You've got enough to keep you occupied here.

The air in your helmet is stuffy, and the plastic's going fogged even though it's not supposed to. You wish you knew whether there was air in the ship, but there's no easy way of telling. Besides, you haven't had time. You'll just have to keep the helmet on for a bit.

You lean your back against the hard metal door and look at her. She reminds you of a line from Sassoon—*why do you lie with your legs ungainly huddled . . . ?*

She's ungainly, all right. One leg is crumpled up on the bunk in a way that's going to put creases in her crimson slacks. Her head and shoulders droop over the edge, her green sweater and yellow hair making her look like a daffodil that needs water badly.

You are going over to her any minute, but before that you want to study the cabin, so you let your gaze sweep over it. It's a perfectly ordinary cabin, except for the girl on the bunk. A little furniture; a few books. Nothing really luxurious from your way of thinking. No indication of why the girl should be lying so awkwardly dead on an empty, drifting spaceship. Everything is in its place—except the girl's head, which ought to be on the pillow.

You go across and turn her over and straighten her legs just because you want to see her face and because you want her head to lie on the pillow. She'll look better that way, you think.

And as you turn her over, you realize that she isn't dead at all. At least, the smooth swell of her breast is rising and falling in a way that usually denotes respiration. But her face is as white as dead flesh, and her eyes are peacefully closed.

Nonchalantly, impersonally, staring down at her, you slap her face. It has no effect. So you slap her again, twice as hard. Still no effect. No real effect, that is. The slapping certainly brings a pink flush to her cheeks and makes her look fairly pretty. But it doesn't make her open her eyes. She simply lies there breathing, just breathing.

So, you think, there must be air in the cabin. You take your helmet off and feel grateful for the coolness of the air that makes love to your face. It's a little stale, the air, but not as stale as that in the helmet. One day, maybe, they'll invent an air-purifier which really does that. Until then, you'll take it stale but cool.

The girl, you imagine, is drugged. Ordinary sleep wouldn't protect her from those slaps. So you decide to wait there until she comes round. You grab a chair and sit facing the girl and the

door at the same time. So far you haven't found anyone else on the ship. But that doesn't mean there can't be anyone else.

So you watch the door and the girl, and you think about things. You've got all the time in the world—all worlds. Your own ship is riding along outside at matched velocity, so there's nothing to worry about on that score. And a man with your money doesn't ever have to be anywhere at any particular time, so you can just go on drifting with the drugged girl for ever, if necessary. You hope it won't be necessary, though as you glance at her face, you can think of less pleasant ways of spending eternity.

The yellow hair looks as though it hasn't been neglected, but there are no signs that it has become a fetish. The eyelids are closed so you can't see what color her eyes are, but you can guess that they're blue. They ought to be, anyway. And the smooth skin over her cheek bones is more like a baby's than a peach's. You never did like peaches. Not that you are overfond of babies. . . .

She is, you decide in a detached sort of fashion, beautiful. You wonder again what the hell she's doing in a stupor on an empty ship that's just drifting along without drive and without apparent direction.

When you first saw the ship from your own telescanner, you thought maybe it had been pirated—such things still happen occasionally. But then, as you brought in the magnifier and studied every exposed inch of the hull and found no holes, no dents, you began to change your mind. Pirates usually shoot first—and straight. So you tried to contact the ship on your radio. No dice. Either there was something wrong, or everything was all right and they just wanted to stay anonymous. But if there was a possibility of something being wrong, you had to investigate. You told yourself that it was your moral duty to look in and see if they needed help. Even so, you knew damned well that you only came across because you thought it might relieve a little of the boredom you'd been feeling lately.

So you put on a spacesuit and kicked your way over to the bigger ship. The airlock gave you no trouble. You walked down the corridors and opened every door you came to. In the engine room everything looked fine and the fuel guages showed a big reserve. But there was no one there. Nor was there anyone in any of the other chambers. Only this one. Only this girl, this beautiful, drugged girl.

Now, with your helmet off, you can hear the silence. No sound anywhere. You've never known a ship to be so soundless. Usually there's the quiet throb or purr from the motors, a buzz of talk from the passengers, coming through the walls; footfalls and laughing and coughing and creaking. But there's none of that here. Not on this ship. This ship's dead.

You wonder whether it's dead all over, and you want to complete your tour of inspection, but you're afraid that if you leave the cabin the girl will be gone when you get back. There's no reason to think that. You just do. That's the way it's happened in so many books you've read.

Still, you'd certainly like to find the captain's cabin. You could have a look at the papers and get an idea what ship it was, where registered, where bound, the passenger list and so on. If there are any papers.

The more you think of it, the more you feel that there aren't any papers. Leaving them, you imagine, would be a mistake on the part of whoever was responsible for the emptiness of the ship.

Still, they left the girl . . .

You look at her again. You're getting tired of waiting. All your thinking isn't getting you anywhere. You haven't got enough data. The girl can give you more.

You get up, go across and slap her again. You get a slightly guilty sort of feeling that you like slapping her, and that makes you stop doing it. Anyway, you seem to have got through this time.

She stirs. She stiffens herself and then relaxes again. She opens her mouth and then closes it. She grunts and then goes silent. She ends up almost exactly as she was before. But now there's blood in her cheeks and a little artery is pulsing gently in her temple.

You look at the artery and guess that she must be about thirty, plus or minus two or three. Then you notice a couple of embryo crow's-feet at the corners of her eyes, you reckon you can forget about the minus. Call her thirty-two and you'd probably be right, you think. A nice age. Your own.

But this isn't helping any, so you give in to the pleasure of slapping her again, several times. You get a better response, and you think you've done enough so you go back to your chair and watch her.

She wriggles about a bit, waves her arms lazily in the air and lets them drop back, one hand to her forehead, grunting in a deliciously

feminine way all the while. She twiddles her toes and draws her knees up, resplendent in rather crimped crimson slacks. Then she opens her eyes.

Her head is a little on one side so her gaze comes out into the cabin. It shoots past you and comes to rest on the bulkhead nearby, as though she suddenly discovers how interesting rivets can be. You don't say anything.

A moment later, her eyes change position and she's looking straight at you. They are blue eyes, all right, and for all the expression in them she might be idly comparing you with the rivets and coming out on their side.

"Hullo," you say.

You've certainly got the first word in, even if it isn't much of a word, and it ought to help to break the ice that's covering her eyes.

"Maybe you can help," she says. "It depends on how much intelligence you've got."

So, you think, this one doesn't prevaricate or circumlocute. This one deals with essentials. Greetings are out. Explanations are out.

An intelligent blonde! This is certainly something you'd never find in a book! All that worries you is that by the looks of things you're going to have trouble keeping up with her.

"What happened?" you ask, and feel from the way she looks at you that she thinks it's a dumb question.

"I thought you might know," she says, not hiding her disappointment. "Know the details, I mean. I can only extrapolate."

"Do that. Then maybe I *could* help."

She hasn't taken her eyes off you and she doesn't now. She just lets them flicker over you as though she's working out what kind of a man you are. You begin to feel that she may be a little too smart, a little too clever. You're not going to trust her till you know her better. And you hope to do that.

"I was in this cabin, resting in the bunk, when the door burst open and two men came in," she explains. "They didn't give me a chance to do anything. Before I could move they injected me with something. I passed out."

It doesn't sound right, somehow. "You didn't even scream?" you ask her.

"I didn't have time. Besides—I've never screamed in my life."

You can well believe that latter bit. "And where did they inject you?"

"In my arm," she says, giving you the old look, the look they always give.

"Okay. Now extrapolate," you say.

"Well, I suppose the ship was attacked. By whom and for what reason I can't say. The men who injected me were strangers. They must have come from outside the ship. Injecting me was their method of getting me out of the way. I've never been attacked by pirates before."

You get up and start walking about the cabin, not because you want to stretch but because you can't stand those two blue eyes washing you clean all over.

"What makes you think they were pirates?" Even as you ask the question you begin to wonder why she isn't showing any interest in the rest of the people who must have been on the ship. There's something odd about her. Damned odd!

"What else?" she replies. "If they weren't pirates in the ordinary sense, they were in the legal sense."

You don't bother to ask what she means by ordinary sense. You can guess. But it's interesting that she feels a possibility that they weren't ordinary pirates. This will give you a lead-in to the other question you want to ask.

"Was there anyone of importance on the ship?"

"I don't know. I don't know who the other passengers were. Nobody *seemed* terribly important."

So she didn't know who the other passengers were, but she knew that her attackers were strangers. You don't ask her about that because for the moment you don't want to pin her down. You don't want her to think you find her story rather odd.

"Tell me about you," she says, and you know she doesn't mean your life-history.

"I was cruising around when I spotted your ship. I sent the usual call and got no reply. Scanners showed me that the ship wasn't under drive, which is unusual out here. I came over. Here I am."

"What did you find?"

"Nothing."

"The ship is empty?" Her voice has an edge to it, but you're not sure it's a natural edge.

"Except for you and me. Does that worry you?"

"No. but it puzzles me. Where have the rest gone? And why was I left aboard?"

"Try extrapolating," you say tiredly, and swing towards the door. "I'll set the ship for Earth. The whole thing can be settled there. Don't interfere with the settings."

She's still looking at you as you go out of the door, and her look tells you that she is not used to being told what not to do. But you can't help that. The ship has to be taken to Earth and the whole matter investigated. The law requires you to do what you are doing. Besides—why should she object . . . ?

So you get along to the engine room and poke around. The first thing you look for is the airlock control. You pull it over and know that every exit from the ship is now fast. Blue-eyes won't be giving you the slip while you're setting the motors.

A brief study of the charts and a few readings from the instruments tell you where you are. You set up a time-delay circuit that will cut in the motors and orient the ship towards Earth in fifteen minutes. Then you leave the engine room, locking the door behind you.

Back in the girl's cabin you tell her what you've done. "The time-lag will just give me enough time to get back to my ship and tag along beside you. I'll come aboard for the landing when we're nearer Earth."

"I can land the ship," she says. She is looking at you with more interest than before. You can guess that your thick black hair is having something of an effect on her, and that she is not exactly repulsed by your rugged features and tall body. You know you're handsome and there's no sense in denying it. With Blue-eyes around, you're glad you are handsome.

"Even so," you say, "I'll come aboard for the landing. If you can also work a radio, you can get in touch with me any time you want. The radio room's intact. Be seeing you."

You start to go out again and she calls to you. "Aren't you interested in my name?"

You turn at the door and give her your very best smile. "I always name my women myself. You're Marie. Marie Celeste."

Then you get away quickly and slip back to the engine room. You fix up another time-delay monitor, this time for the airlocks.

You get to the main airlock just as it opens. Then you jerk on your helmet and start across to your ship, knowing that the monitor will keep the airlocks fast for some hours. The only place the girl can go is space, but she seems the kind who might even do that if

she had a strong enough reason for not going to Earth—and you begin to suspect that she has.

On your ship you hasten to the control cabin and stand there with your hand on the firing lever and your eyes on the scanner. Dead on the dot the motors of the big ship spit flame. Your hand comes down and your own motors start coughing. When velocities are matched and vectors paralleled, you lock the drive. A few moments later the hyperdrive snaps in. The telescanners tell you that the big ship is still there beside you. So, you are both streaking along at something a good deal in excess of the speed of light. That will bring you both in the region of Earth in not too many hours.

Now all you have to do is sit back and wonder what's going to happen when you land.

II

ABOUT a million miles from Earth the hyperdrive cuts out. That's the way you planned it. Ordinary drive is fast enough for the last lap. And now it's safe for you to go outside again. You just want to check that she's still there. You'd look silly dragging an empty ship down to the surface and trying to convince the authorities about what happened. At least, that's what you tell yourself as you shoot across to the big ship again.

A few minutes later you open the cabin door. Marie is still on the bunk. But this time you notice she isn't in slacks and sweater. The light that comes on as you press the button makes her bare arms gleam and shows up the folds in the slinky nightdress she's wearing.

She stirs and looks at you. It's a nice look. Tells you quite a lot. Just what you wanted to know. She sits up and the nightdress clings to her. She knows it does.

"Anything wrong?" she drawls.

"Not one little thing," you say, smiling. "I thought you might be lonely. It's been a dull trip. Thought you might like to talk."

She raises an eyebrow, nicely. "Talk?"

You laugh and go across and swing yourself onto the bunk beside her. It's a luxury ship, all right. The bunks are double.

"Aren't you going to put the light out?" she says.

You like the way she doesn't go coy or coquettish. "I always talk better with the light on," you say. Then you take her in your arms.

A good while later you suddenly realize that the ships must be getting near Earth and that several dull but essential adjustments have to be made. So you give her a love-tap and roll off the bunk. She rouses from the dreamy state she's been in and smiles at you. You smile back and tell her that you're going to handle the landing now.

"Get dressed," you say. "And pack a bag. You must come and stay with me. I've got a nice house."

"Have you?" she says, and there's a sort of self-satisfied gleam in her eye that's a bit disturbing. You start to feel that *you've* been conquered.

She's still smiling and gleaming as you go out of the door. Then you start up a gleam of your own as you move towards the engine room, but it's not self-satisfaction that causes it. While you were in there with her you stroked and kissed every inch of her arms. And the light was on.

And there was no sign of an injection mark.

III

EARTH looks good as you lead Marie away from the Interrogation Center. So good that it takes your mind off the crazy situation you've landed yourself in. The space port is set deep in the countryside, screened by tall green trees, the kind of green you find only on Earth. And the air is fresh and cool and clear. And the sun is playing a golden symphony all around you, with little bits of *forte* here and there as it glints on the metal of helicabs that circle the port like expectant seagulls, waiting for the red flash that will call them down to pick up a fare.

A flash darts out from the control tower even as you look at it, and one of the helicabs drops down with whirling rotors onto the wide flat roof of the Playdome. Tiny specks cross the roof and mount the helicab. It wings away upwards to disappear against the bright, almost cruel blue of the sky.

It's good to be back, you think. The song they always sing. You take in a deep, satisfying breath—and then realize that Marie is speaking to you.

"Sorry, I didn't hear," you say.

She repeats: "What will they do? They can't do anything to me, can they?"

"Nothing at all," you reply. "Not a single thing. Now let's take one of these helicabs to my place. You'd probably like to eat."

She agrees that she would, so you lead her over towards the Playdome, which is the only place that helicabs can take off and land without fouling the giant rockets from the launching apron.

As you walk you think over what happened in the Interrogation Center. You wouldn't be surprised if they think *you* are in on this cooty set-up. The Interrogation officer certainly looked skeptical when Marie told him her story. And when she couldn't tell him the name of the ship, where it had been bound, or the name of the captain—well, the man had seemed to find it difficult to stay polite.

All Marie had told him was that she picked up a passage on the ship at the Pleasure Field on Japetus, off Saturn. She had just wanted to go on a long quiet cruise. She hinted at an unhappy love affair. She said she had no interest in the name of the ship or the captain and she wasn't a bit concerned about where the vessel was bound.

She had taken a passage on it in order to get away from people, and that was just what she had done. She was sorry to be so unhelpful, but she didn't see why everything should be blamed on her. There was no law against staying in one's cabin, was there? No, the Interrogation officer had said, there wasn't. But there was a look in his eye which led you to believe that he thought there ought to be.

In the helicab, Marie purrs with delight as you pass over some nice country. She seems to have forgotten her sad love affair. You wonder why. Could be you. Could be the scenery. Could be that she never had one . . .

At your house you let her wander about exploring while you go through your mail. Nothing important except perhaps the plea from your bankers to let them take a bit more out of your current account and invest it. You couldn't care less what they do. You'll never use it. Sometimes you wish you'd never invented the cheap power source that keeps the royalties rolling in. Once, you couldn't get enough money. Now you've got too much.

Still, you write a few checks for the charities among the pile, and guess that will take care of a few more thousand.

Then Marie comes back and you stop thinking about yourself. You're grateful to her for that.

"Beautiful," she says, beaming about the place.

"You are indeed," you grin.

She laughs, but you don't think she's really amused. There seems

to be a sort of restraint about her. As though this is something she has planned. Something she knew would happen in just this way, and so is not really exciting. It disturbs you.

"Did you say something about eating?" she demands.

You don't answer her, but go across to the wall and press a couple of buttons. Simultaneously, or so it seems, a table comes up from the floor in the middle of the room and two chairs rise up beside it. Then, from the ceiling down comes a tray of food. It settles like a steam-rollered butterfly on the table.

You're watching Marie all the time. She doesn't look surprised, but she looks interested. She looks as though she is more or less familiar with these things. Which is a little odd. You'd have expected her to comment on the table at least.

For the descending table is of your own design—and unique . . .

That disturbs you, too. She's a very disturbing girl, is Marie.

You sit down at the table with a preoccupied air, and Marie comments on it.

"I was thinking about something in my mail," you lie.

"Bad?"

"Not bad, but—" you laugh, "—disturbing. I shall have to go out soon. You'll be okay here?"

"Perfect. I'll pine for you while you're gone. Will you like that?"

This lovey-dovey stuff is beginning to bore you, but you suppose you'll have to go on with it for a while. "Love it," you say, and try to sound as though you might mean it.

The Interrogation Center is the first place you call, after the meal. That stuff about the mail was nonsense. You wonder if Marie knew it.

It takes a little while and quite a bit of talking before the Interrogation officer will give you the name of the firm that's looking into the identity of the ship you found. Then, probably because he knows you and hasn't really any justification for not telling you, he says it's a private inquiry company called Checkers. You thank him and wonder whether to slip him a check. But he looks so pallidly conscientious and he's probably so worried by the whole thing that he'd book you for bribery. So you leave him to stew among the piles of papers around him and head for Checkers.

As you pass the Security Hangar in your neat little jet roadster, you wonder whether it would be a good idea to drop in and see the men at work on the ship. But you guess it will be under heavy guard

now and you wouldn't be allowed on board. Strange, when you were wandering all over the vessel a while back, just as if you owned it.

Owned it. Who owned it? Who paid for the metal and the men who put the metal together? Who took the rake-off from the fares and the gambling saloons aboard it? You don't know. You hope to find out. And that's where Checkers comes in.

They have a fine block of offices in the city, and as you park the roadster and stare up at the facade you reckon they must do a fair amount of business.

Inside, your name means a lot to the redhead at the desk and you get shown up right away to the offices of the man who's handling your particular problem.

He's a tough-looking, rough-looking, intelligent-faced man with eyes that don't dance about and a chin that's even firmer than the eyes. He's got big hands, wide shoulders and a massive chest. You reckon he hasn't been sitting behind a desk all his life.

His name's Marson Cade and you gather from that that he was one of the first kids to be born on Mars. Pioneers in those days had a yen for sentimentality. But Marson Cade hasn't inherited it, you guess.

"So you want to know how far we've got?" he says, looking at you as though he means to recognize you if he ever sees you again.

You're sitting in a soft chair in front of his desk in his plush office, and the events out in space seem miles away—as indeed they are. And Marson Cade is so undramatic that it's difficult to keep in mind the almost unprecedented thing that's happened. Still, you try.

"I went over the ship when I was on it and couldn't find a thing that would identify it," you say. "I thought maybe with instruments you'd be better able to do that than I would."

"What sort of instruments?" Cade asks.

"Well, X-ray, for example. All engines have serial numbers stamped inside them where they can't be filed away. Did you find one on the ship?"

Cade purses his lips and looks away. Evidently he has memorized you by now. "There was a girl on the ship," he says. "What do you think of her?"

You're pretty certain that Cade has a copy of the record taken in the Interrogation Center, but you want to play for time.

"I think she's very beautiful and attractive," you say.

Cade gives you a long, steady look and compresses his lips. If it's

time you want, you'd better not play for it that way, you think. So you stop playing.

"There's a lot about her that puzzles me," you say. "A lot that disturbs me, too. I'm not sure that I trust her."

"What things and why not?" Cade says.

You're beginning to like him. He isn't like the Interrogation officer, who was primly official and terribly frustrated. Cade is solid, sensible and free from the taint of officialdom and conceit. You reckon you can work with him. You reckon you can tell him things that you couldn't tell the Interrogation officer.

"These are some things that won't be on record," you say. Cade nods. He understands. "First of all, though she certainly acted as though she had been drugged, and said she'd been, I couldn't find an injection mark on her arm." Cade must know what you are driving at but he doesn't even smirk. "Then, although she says she doesn't know who the captain was or who were the passengers, she told me that the men who injected her were strangers to the ship. On top of all that, she doesn't behave right. She shows no interest in the rest of the people who were on the ship; and she seems too damned confident about the way things are working out. It's almost as though—as though this is all part of a prearranged scheme. Sounds crazy, I guess, but that's the feeling I've got. That's what disturbs me."

Cade doesn't say anything for a while. He just stares out of the window and thinks. Then he brings his gaze back to you and starts to ask questions.

"Where is she staying on Earth?"

"With me."

"What's she doing for money?"

"At the moment—using mine."

"You in love with her?"

"No."

"Sure?"

"Yes."

And so it goes on. He gives you a regular grilling. But you don't mind. All the questions are sensible and you can see where they are leading. Cade is simply satisfying himself that you're on the level.

"All right," he says at last. "I guess you're okay. I think we can work together. It's not a bad plan to have someone on the inside.

But don't forget, you're working with us, not with the Peterside woman—"

"The who?" you interrupt.

"Oh, you wouldn't know that, would you? We checked up on her, of course. Didn't take us long to track her down by photographs and a few peculiar marks. She's Marie Peterside. That's all. Doesn't mean much. She's fairly rich—or was a year or two back when her only relative, an aunt, died and left her a stack. Since then she's been getting rid of it fast, by the way she's been living. Nothing coming in. A lot going out. Pleasure-seeker, nothing more."

Strange coincidence, you think, that you chose her correct christian name, but only coincidence. But you find it hard to believe that she's just a pleasure-seeker. You've known a few like that and usually they aren't quite so self-possessed, quite so intelligent, or—quite so disturbing.

"Okay," you say, harking back, "so I'm working with you. That's what I want to do. I've got no ties with Marie. Now what have you found out about the ship?"

"Full circle, eh?" says Cade, with a grin. "I see you keep on until you get what you want. Well, now that we're working together I don't mind telling you. We've X-rayed every inch of that engine and a good few inches of other things. No number."

That brings you upright in your chair. But you don't ask any silly questions. You just think about it. Since way back when, the law has been very strict about engine numbers on spaceships—and every engine yard knows it. Even you, with all your money, wouldn't like to try to get an engine built without a number. And once the number's in, it stays. There's no way of getting it out.

"There's more," says Cade, after giving you a minute to think about the number business. "We went right through the ship—had a hundred men on the job—and we didn't find any water. Tanks were there. But no water."

"Empty water tanks?" you say, because the meaning hasn't got through yet.

"That's right. Now why would pirates take water from the ship? You don't have to answer, because they didn't. Our chemists have proved that there *never was any water in the tanks.*"

He says the last few words slowly and deliberately. And you suddenly see what he's driving at. A great cruising vessel sets out on a

long trip without water! A vessel that's apparently a good few years old has never had water in its tanks!

"That's crazy!" you exclaim.

Cade nods. "Sure it is. When I first heard, I thought maybe *I* was crazy. Then this report came through—just a minute or two before you arrived." He pokes at a sheet of paper on his desk. "It's the analysts' reports. They took samples of everything on the ship and pulled them to pieces chemically. Everything was routine and ordinary—except the fuel."

"What about the fuel?" you ask, and you're more tense and excited than you've been for years.

"The hydrogen peroxide is dimolecular."

You start to open your mouth but Cade comes out with: "So that's crazy, too! I know. There's no such thing as dimolecular hydrogen peroxide. Look everywhere and you won't find it. It doesn't exist—*on Earth, or in the Solar System.*"

He says those few words slowly and deliberately, too. As he says them, a cold prickling eats into your muscles, and there's a hard unpleasant twisting in your abdomen. The office is cooled by the latest methods, but you're sweating all the same. You suddenly realize that your hands are hurting, and when you look down at them they are gripping the chair-arms like an epileptic's. You release them and sit back, swallowing hard.

Cade is staring at you levelly, the way he was when you first came into the room. You can guess that your reaction has satisfied him about your lack of complicity in this affair. But that's a side issue.

"I see what you mean," you say. "That's very important, isn't it?"

"Just about the most important thing that's ever happened to Earth," Cade answers. Laconically he adds: "We've never had a visitor from the stars before."

"She's alien," you murmur. Your thoughts are all mixed up. "She doesn't need water. I slept with her." You can't *believe* that she isn't human. She seemed so warmly, yieldingly human back there on the ship, on the bunk . . .

"That appears to be it," Cade says, breaking in on your reverie. "If she isn't alien, then she's certainly been taken for a ride by one! So what do we do?"

You know that he isn't really asking you. Even if he were you wouldn't be able to help. Not until you've sorted it all out. Not until you've thought about it for a while.

"This is the way I look at it," Cade continues. "There were no pirates. There was no captain and no passengers. She was on that ship alone from the beginning, I'm sure. And she had no water. That means she isn't Marie Peterside. Easy enough to assume the identity of a girl whose only relative died a while ago; a girl who's got pots of money to spend on luxury cruises. So this—this alien floats around in space waiting to be picked up by someone and taken to Earth—the central planet of the Solar Federation. You turn up and oblige. She should be grateful to you."

You ignore that. You think it's a bit cruel, though you can't blame the man for letting it slip out. You certainly seem to have done just what she wanted by dragging her down to Earth in record time—and thinking all the while that she might not want to come! Still . . .

"What are you going to do? Have her arrested?"

Cade shakes his heavy head. "Look, you and I are the only ones who know about this—apart from the analysts, and I can take care of them. We've got to be careful. Arresting her won't do any good. On what charge? And what do we do with her if she's guilty? How does that help us know what's going on? No, this woman—if she *is* a woman—didn't come here to stare at the sights. There's some better reason behind her trip. We've got to find out what it is."

You get up from your chair and start pacing while he talks. Your emotions won't let you stay sitting down.

"Whatever it is, it's bound to be something nasty," Cade goes on. "Else she wouldn't have come so surreptitiously. So we watch our step. My men are still working on the problem. I want you to help from your end. Stay with—we'll call her Marie Peterside, for convenience—stay with Marie Peterside and watch everything she does. Don't let her out of your sight more than you can help. Observe her with an eye opened by what you have learned here. And report as often as possible and when anything new crops up—any time day or night." He laughs. "From her photographs I should say that a lot of men would take great pleasure in sticking that close to her."

"Not if they knew she was an alien," you say.

"Maybe. But for Jupiter's sake don't let her see that you know it. As far as she's concerned you are still puzzled by this pirate attack. I'll see to it that the officials stay that way, too. This is a big thing, and only you and I can handle it."

"You think we *can* handle it?" you ask, doubtfully.

Cade lets out a long breath. You reckon he has doubts, too, though

he has to be optimistic at the start of the quest. "We've got to, man, we've got to! Now get to hell out of here and let me work!"

So, in a state that seems more like a dream than reality, you go back to your roadster. You stand by it for a moment, staring down at the steering wheel, not seeing it, just thinking about that time back in the ship, on the bunk. You can't get it out of your mind. And it hurts like hell!

"Hullo," she says, and you swing around with popping eyes to find the lady herself standing right beside you.

"I got the feeling that life was passing me by, so I thought I'd take a trip into town. I'm glad I bumped into you. Now you can take me home—if you are going home."

You've got to keep up the pretense, you tell yourself. She's a woman, remember that. She's not an alien. She's a woman. She's a woman. You happen to know . . .

"Sure I'm going back," you grin at her. "Hop in. Have a nice trip in town?"

While she's telling you about it, you start up the roadster and pull away from the Checkers building. You wonder if she followed you there, and whether she now knows what firm is on the job. Your mind is full of thoughts that won't align. And she's talking beside you, and you never did like people talking to you while you're driving. And her talking about mundane things makes it worse.

It makes it so much worse that you don't see the other roadster until it's far too late to do anything about it. In the split second before the crash, you wonder if you are going to die and whether you'll get hurt in the process.

Then the two roadsters meet, their jets whine, and the resulting crash of sound and crushing blow knocks all thoughts from your mind.

When you wake up again to a crazily teetering world that's washed all over pink, you know that you are not dead, but that the roadster is. You get to your feet unsteadily, helped by someone's arm, and stare down at the tangled wreckage. Yours and the other fellow's are both beyond repair. Thank God for insurance, you think.

Then you see the blood. And you remember Marie. You let out a yell and plunge forward and start to scrabble furiously in the wreckage.

But a grim-faced policeman pulls you away, drags you off through

the crowd of onlookers and into the waiting ambulance. There he sits you down and gives you a drink. You hope it's whiskey, but it's sal volatile and you spit it out and glare at the cop.

"Where is she?" you demand. You reckon the act you are putting on must look good, for the policeman lowers his eyes and wriggles his big hulk.

"Take it easy, feller," the cop says. "Take it real easy. That was a bad smash. She got—badly hurt. The other driver's all right; just a few scratches, like you. You were lucky. She—well, she was badly hurt, like I said."

You can see that the man feels terrible about it, even though it's part of his job. You think you'd better help him out.

"You mean—she's dead?" you say, in what you judge to be just the right deep tone of infinite grief.

The policeman nods and starts looking at his hands. "Yeah. Yeah—that's right. I'm sorry, mister, I—"

"That's all right," you tell him, getting up and looking brave. "I'll be getting along now. Nothing I can do, I suppose?" You try to give the impression of a man who wants to be alone with his suffering.

"Well—" the cop hesitates. "I hate to bother you, but there're one or two details . . ."

"All right," you breathe out. "Go ahead. Try to be quick, though."

When he's finished writing it all down in his little book, he turns to you and holds out his hand. "Good-bye, mister. You're taking this on the chin. I hope I take it like that if I ever have to. You've got guts."

You pat his arm, feel a twinge of guilt and hurry out of the ambulance. He was a nice guy. It seemed a pity to kid him that way. But it wouldn't have been politic not to. You have to show mourning for a dead lady passenger. You can't go around clapping your hands in the air and whooping for joy, even if that's the way you feel—as you feel right now.

She's gone. True, it was a nasty way to go, but for the world's sake, for Earth's sake, and for the sake of every man, woman and child in the Solar System—it is a good thing that she has gone. And, of course, it won't be doing *you* any harm.

So with a lighter heart than you ever guessed you'd have at this juncture, you start out for home. You don't go back to Checkers just yet. You don't feel like talking about it now. You want to savor it

mentally before handing it over to Cade. The man will be in his office all night, you guess. You can call on him later.

When the cab drops you down at your house, you are planning a nice double whiskey to wash away the taste of *sal volatile*. Whiskey, then a cigar, a good one. You go into the place.

"Hullo," she says. "Back early."

And there, miraculously, incredibly, impossibly in front of you is a smiling, alluring, very much alive Marie Peterside.

IV

YOU can't keep up the pretense any more, despite Cade's instructions. You just can't go on acting naturally and unconcerned. Besides, from the look that darts into her eyes, she must have observed your utter astonishment.

You walk across to a chair and motion her to do the same, all thought of whiskey forgotten. She follows your directions, but you can see that she's alert and on her guard. Suddenly, you are very tired of it all.

"Look," you say. "We'll have to have a showdown. Let's stop acting."

The girl looks at you keenly, and there's no friendship in her gaze; only a hard, determined expression.

"I imagine something happened to my duplicate," she says, evenly, and once again you are struck by her directness and acuity. "That is the main fault with human tissues. They are so very mortal."

"Your duplicate was mashed up in a car crash," you say. "So you admit you are not human. What's it all about?"

She shrugs, very humanly. "That must be obvious to you. My race will conquer Earth and the Federation's planets. Humans only waste their resources. We can extract full benefit from them."

"So your race is unethical and militant," you say. You don't know why you say it. But you have to say something, and the whole situation is so much like a dream sequence that you are completely disorientated.

"Not really," she replies. "No more than humans are when they slaughter cattle for sustenance, or exploit the labor of alien planets. You are convinced that you are superior to the creatures you subjugate—that you have something, some higher quality they lack. So it is with us. On our scale of existence, on our plane of being, hu-

mans are so much cattle. The only difference, perhaps, is that where cattle are useful to you, humans would be superfluous under our system."

You can see that she has something. Whether she is right about the superiority of her race you cannot tell. But if what she says is true, then her analogy seems to hold. Which is tough luck for the human race.

You should be boiling over with rage and indignation by now. You should be lamming into her for her treachery and deceit, for her calm assumption that her race will succeed. You should, indeed, be doing something about clipping her claws. But you are tired, so tired. Maybe it is the reaction from the car crash, but somehow the whole thing seems a little remote. You find yourself looking at it as a bystander, an impersonal observer.

"And how do you plan to effect the conquest?" you ask. "What is your role in the great scheme?"

"Quite simple. We are under no illusions about human resistance, about human weapons. We know that your race would fight to the last man—impelled by some irrational sense of honor and duty wherein the individual fight for survival is subdued by tradition and ethics. In fact, of course, the driving force is cowardice, but we have to allow for it all the same."

You are not quite sure what she is getting at, but the ideas seem to have some substance. You haven't really got the energy to sort them out.

"So I shall plunge the Solar Federation into economic confusion," she continues. "By manipulating the stock market and one or two other things, I can easily cause such a widespread upheaval that any resistance to our attack will be feeble and unorganized."

"Clever," you say. "Clever, but expensive. Very, very expensive."

"It's not clever at all. Just simple common sense—*our* kind of common sense. And as for the expense—aren't you the richest man in the Federation?"

You had vaguely guessed that she was leading up to that. It seemed the obvious thing, now that you know the facts.

"What makes you think I'll let you use my money?" you ask her.

She smiles at you. You can't help thinking that she really does look attractive. So darned attractive that you can't, in your present lethargic state, work up any animosity against her.

"I don't think you'll let me use it," she says. "But I don't need your permission. I shall just use it."

That rouses you a little. "Huh? I'd like to see that!"

She shakes her head. "I'm afraid you won't be able to. A pity, but necessary."

Suddenly you get an inkling of what she's driving at and it fills you with apprehension. You suddenly see the hard inflexible purpose behind her sweet smile; you see the hard brittle determination at the back of her eyes. And you're scared. So scared that you can't move. All you can do is sit and stare at her, wanting to scream with the terror of it; wanting to jump up and run and run and run—away from the blue eyes, away from the yellow hair, the sweet smile and the dark hideous intensity of her purpose.

"I'm really sorry," she says, and somehow you believe her. "I like you a lot. Back on the ship—you remember—that was—wonderful. We don't have anything like it among my race. I shall always be grateful to you for that."

Grateful, you think. You got into bed with her mainly because you wanted to see if she had an injection mark. And she's grateful. You begin to feel that maybe her race is superior. And that helps to take off some of the fear. But only some.

You can feel something being drawn out of you, as though something in the essence of you is evaporating. And you know it is your life that's going. You know that she is using some alien power to kill you, almost painlessly, simply by taking away whatever it is that makes tissue live.

As you look at her, see the slight sadness on her face behind the sheen of mental effort, you realize that you do love her, and that such love is so foolish; as foolish as it is inevitable. You are going to die, in a way that you never knew. And you are going to die loving the one who kills you.

Idly, even as the last spark of life leaves you, you realize that such things have happened before. But not to you . . .

V

YOU do indeed feel sad as you look across at the slumped figure of the Earthman. It is an odd feeling altogether, for you have within you all his memories, right up to the last moment when the final sliver of his life-force passed into you. He was a nice guy—

especially as seen from the point of view of the tissue complex of a human female.

A nice guy. But he had to die. It's a pity he found out so soon. You'd have liked some repetition of the exciting thing you and he did back on the ship. There's nothing like it among your own race. Among your own race, the intellect is all. So much so that even bodies are unnecessary.

And that reminds you that you must change your present material form. The role of Marie Peterside is finished.

It is the work of a few moments only to remove all your clothes and those of the dead man. Then, by concentrating and evoking the powers that were born in you a hundred light years away among the stars, you convert the body of the dead man into that of Marie Peterside; you then convert your own into that of the dead man. You put on his clothes, and dress him in the apparel of Marie Peterside.

The job is nearly finished. You look around for something with which to finish it, and find it in a heavy ornamental vase. You bring the vase crashing down on the body's head, splitting the bone and exposing the brain. Now there is a good reason why the body should be dead.

It's time you reported it, you think, and with the dead man's memories you know just how to do it.

You go into the room where the televizor is and ring through to Checkers. When you finally get on to Marson Cade his face seems as familiar as if you had sat in his office yourself.

"She's dead," you tell him.

Cade looks grim. "I know. We identified her body at the mortuary. You were lucky to get out of the crash alive."

You realize that he's talking about your duplicate. "Let me bring you up to date," you say. And you tell him about coming home and finding another Marie Peterside waiting. You draw on the dead man's memories to supply authentic details.

"I couldn't go through with it," you continue. "I couldn't hide my surprise and she tumbled to the fact that I knew she was an alien. She attacked me. I had to kill her. What do we do now?"

Cade shrugs. "Nothing. She's dead and that's that. I don't suppose it's solved our problem, but we are in the clear temporarily. No doubt someone else will come from wherever she came from. We'll just have to wait until then. Anyway, we'll know better how to deal with it. You just forget the whole thing."

"That won't be easy," you tell him. "Such things don't go out of your memory without effort. But I'll try. Will you do something about the body?"

"Sure. I'll have it picked up right away. Not that it will help us. The aliens made the body perfect in all respects. But it'll save you a lot of trouble."

As you ring off you realize anew how easy it is to deceive humans. The body wasn't perfect in all respects. It didn't have to eat and it didn't have to drink. If the humans were as clever as they thought they were, they would have discovered that in the duplicate's body.

Even so, you are faintly disturbed about that mistake with the water tanks. Understandable, of course. The ship from which your own had been modeled had drifted out into interstellar space and got lost. By the time it reached the region of your own planet everyone was dead and every scrap of food and water had long ago been consumed. So your engineers found empty tanks and duplicated them. How were they to know the tanks had once contained water? There is no water on your planet save that which is synthesized.

The mistake about the fuel is less understandable; indeed, it is completely unjustified, and when you get back you are going to have some hard words to say to the chemists. Just because hydrogen peroxide exists in dimolecular form on your own planet was no excuse for the chemists not to find *some* trace of fuel in the lost ship's tanks.

Still, nothing can be done about that now. More important things require action . . .

VI

THE first news that you are succeeding comes through on the ticker tape you've had installed. The mines on Venus are at a standstill. This is quickly followed by frantic hysteria among the farmers. Silver, copper, oats and wheat are all in the bag. You go on to other commodities.

The brokers on the other end of your phone try to stay unemotional as you clip out orders. "Buy everything! Industrials, oils, entertainment, shipping. Pay special attention to stuff that hasn't moved for days. Buy enough to get people talking. If anyone gets sticky, offer ten points over listing."

You wait a few minutes, watching the ticker splutter out its messages, trying to keep up with the changes you are causing. You are spending millions, all that the dead man had and more. You can guess that never before has so much money moved among the stocks in such a short time.

Then you pick up the phone again. "Sell out! Completely! I don't want to retain a thing. Let it go for whatever you can get."

Once again you go back to the ticker. The confusing reversal is already coming over. Your brokers are certainly efficient. And that's just the way you want it. A little more of this and there won't be any faith left in the Solar System.

It's remarkable, you think, that these humans could build up a civilization based on such arbitrary values. One man with enough money at his command can distort the values of everything. He can raise the price of trivial things until even a king can't buy a pair of shoes. Or he can give away so much gold that a beggar would stagger under the weight of a throw-away gift.

And such people have all the resources of nine planets to play with . . .

There never was any doubt in your mind that the analogy you gave the dead man—the analogy of the cattle—was a true one. And you are even more certain now that your own race should have the benefits of the solar planets. They are being wasted, thrown away on a race of irrational, prejudiced, muddled-thinking creatures.

Your own race is entirely justified in wiping the universe clean of humans, to give more space to people with values that do not change; values that are basic and independent of commercial exploitation. The human mental dwarfs must be displaced by people who have something more than brute desires and ambitions; by people who are in touch with the Infinite, with Truth and Beauty and Goodness and Understanding.

You call into the phone again. "Start buying it all back. How much credit have I got?" The brokers give you a figure that you can imagine is staggering to mere humans, though it means little to your own non-mercenary mind. "All right. That should take us a long way. Make them sell. Offer anything up to a hundred points over the list. Cover every commodity there is. Stack them up! Make **em** groan!"

A chime sings out at the front door. That will be the paper, you think. You go and collect it. The headlines are more or less as you

expected, except that there is more emphasis on the possibility of war than you had bargained for.

The paper quickly runs over the crazy things that have been happening on the market, pointing out that the brokers concerned will not divulge the identity of the financier, then archly indicating that there can't be more than one or two men with enough money to start investing on such a scale. The finger points to you—or rather, to the dead man whose body you occupy. But there's no proof and that's all that matters. By the time proof is forthcoming you will have done irreparable damage.

War, says the paper, will be inevitable unless there is some change in the situation. Already things are happening that could easily be called aggressive—just so long as the injured party is in the right mood.

And that's another thing about humanity that makes you sure your race is doing the right thing. Faced with an economic collapse, they lose whatever veneer of civilization that normally clothes them and begin to plan wars. Instead of tracking the cause of the crisis to its heart and sinew, instead of using their self-proclaimed intelligence to discover the basic anomalies in their economic system, they go ahead with one branch of the system and try to recoup losses by building battleships and sinking them.

The fact that millions of lives are lost in the process does not matter—just so long as the books balance, just so long as the old false values are maintained.

Oh, humanity, humanity! you think. Humans have so much and yet so little!

Back on the phone, you order the brokers to sell. You tell them to give it away if necessary. The recent buying sent values soaring. Now they'll sink again—to rock bottom. Nothing will be worth anything any more—to humans. There'll be nothing in which to believe, nothing to work for. Those who try to start a war might even find that the masses don't think there is anything to fight for.

That will depend—not on the facts, but on the strength of the propaganda. It doesn't have to be true, just so long as it is said loud enough and long enough in the right emotional words.

From what you've read in the books on the ship that got lost, you can imagine the kind of words. Freedom must be fought for. For the sake of the future. Remember you are terrestrial. Remember you are Martian. Remember you are Venusian. Just because we came from

Earth hundreds of years ago doesn't mean we owe Earth allegiance. Earth wants to take away our freedom—fight for it! The Venusians forget they started on Earth. We must make them remember—*make* them!

And no doubt, you think, each faction will pray—to the same god. They will call on God's help because *they* are right, because only *they* are entitled to divine protection.

You begin to feel a tired, sick irritation with the human race. There is nothing similar among your own race, so you do not know what you want to do with them. The dead man's memories make you think that they ought to be shaken and shaken until some sense is knocked into their heads. But your own mind, your own memories know that that would do nothing. There is nothing to be done—except to exterminate them. To rid the universe of such selfish, savage, hypocritical morons.

Another paper comes—a special edition. There is no doubt now that war will come. It may even be here by the time the paper reaches you, says the editor. Someone is responsible, says the editor, someone has deliberately caused this situation by manipulating the stock market. And that someone must be discovered and punished. Again the finger points at you. The editor demands that you be investigated and that if you are found to be responsible then you must be executed.

You fling the paper down in disgust, without reading the details of the financial hysteria that's sweeping the Solar Federation.

That editor's leader is typical. It represents the thoughts, the attitude of millions. A man must be responsible. Kill him, then we'll be all right. Don't bother to remedy the system that enables a man to do what he has done. Leave that intact for later tries. Just get the man. Just get some blood and everything will be all right!

You switch off the ticker. You don't need it any more. Your work is done. The Solar System is chaotic, ready for the plucking. All you need do now is communicate with those who are to come after you and tell them that the time is ripe.

Sinking into a chair, you begin to energize your mind to cover the vast distance to the stars where they are waiting. Your eyes are closed and you are just beginning to throw off the material shackles, when you hear the door open. You look up and see Marson Cade.

"Hullo," you say. "Come to investigate me?"

You notice that he carries a weapon that he keeps pointed at you.

The dead man's memories tell you that it can kill, fast but painfully.

"No," says Cade, and he looks singularly unworried and self-possessed. "I've done all that where you are concerned. Now all I have to do is kill you."

"So simple, so easy," you scorn. "Just pull the trigger and I'm dead." You decide—knowing the answer beforehand—to see whether this man has any idea at all of what he is doing. "And how will that help you? How will it help the world and the solar system? Whether you kill me or not, the Federation is finished. Don't you think you ought to find out why I did it? Why a man who has lived peacefully for more than half a lifetime should suddenly do a thing like this? And don't you think you should take a look at the system that gives me the chance to do it?"

Cade smiles, but it is not a pleasant smile. There is too much pain and shame in it. "We shall do some of those things. One good thing that has come out of your activities is that we shall overhaul our system of values. We might even start to think differently. Maybe we won't start any more wars, after what you have taught us. This may well be the beginning of a new era for humanity."

Melodrama, you think, they can't resist injecting melodrama into things. "That's if you get over the present situation," you say, still keeping up the pretence that you are the dead man. "There's going to be an all mighty crash!"

Cade shakes his head and smiles again. You get the first twinge of alarm. Surely he doesn't—

"There'll be no crash," Cade says. "Nothing has happened at all. We let you go on doing these things just to see what you were driving at. That ticker was fed directly from my office. Your brokers were a couple of my clerks. The newspapers were specially printed for you. We thought it was worth it."

"But—but how did you know I was going to do that?" you ask, and there is a most unpleasant twisting in your stomach.

"Even while the two of you were at the Interrogation Center, my men were rigging up microphones here. I heard everything that was said—including your plans for conquering Earth. I knew you killed him, but I didn't reveal my knowledge because I wanted to see what you would do. When you ordered a ticker I arranged the whole thing. I'm sorry, but the stocks are exactly as they were before you came."

"So you know I'm an alien," you say. There is a heaviness in your heart, the friable, sensitive heart of the dead man.

"Yes, I know that," Cade says. "And you must know that you will have to die."

"Yes. Yes, I see that. But others will come. Others will not be deceived so easily."

"We shall be ready for them," Cade asserts. "You have taught us a great deal. More than you know. Your race would have to try something very different next time."

You feel that even now there might be a way of escape. If you can just keep him talking until you can change back into your native form, his weapon will not be able to hurt you. You start to concentrate.

But he must see you doing it, for his weapon moves slightly and he stops speaking. He must be seeing the change in your tissue, the gradual dissolving into vapor. You try harder, concentrate more.

And then you see his finger move.

And then—

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BATTLE *of* WIZARDS

By L. RON HUBBARD

ILLUSTRATED BY JON ARFSTROM

¶ The Galactic Council wanted mineral rights on Deltoid—but the situation was so explosive that even the Galactic Navy refused to touch it!

The humans were outnumbered and the council was grave. No one had asked them here to this dark valley on the galaxy's rim. No one had pleaded for their arts. They had come and nothing short of miracles would let them stay.

The Mineralogy Service wanted Deltoid. Their chief had reported to the Galactic Council that Deltoid contained an almost unlimited supply of catalyst crystals in a natural state, a fact which would reduce the cost of freighter fuel manufacture by two-thirds. No one had argued with the need. The Galactic Council had sent for the navy and had told the navy to "safeguard" a mining expedition to Deltoid. The navy had refused. A shot fired in the presence of catalyst crystals would wipe out the planet and therefore the project.

An order, then, had wandered through dusty corridors to a small, forsaken office in the Military Defense Building of the capital to lie amongst fly-specked papers on a scratched desk. A bored chief of section had given it to Angus McBane and Angus had offered a few faint suggestions about overdue leave. But the leave was two standard years late anyway and Angus took the smudged sheet to supply. The office of Civil Affairs did not rate very high and what he got was third and fourth hand.

They loaded the *Argus* 48 with five months supplies, put aboard thirty marines and eighteen sailors who had been found a disgrace to the service and gave the ship routine clearance.

Rusted and dented amid the fine, shining vessels of the important



classifications, the *Argus* 48 lay for twelve standard hours after release patching up a starboard port which had connected with a meteor and then fifteen more trying to get circulation into the jet cooling system. There was some raillery from the mechanics of the government base: the *Argus* 48 was sailing under a CA and couldn't expect anything more.

Twenty-three days later they landed on Deltoid, in a valley indicated by the original survey, "high walled and impossible of land assault, sparse in game but containing the bulk of the beings that inhabit this system." The valley was about a hundred and fifty leagues in diameter. They made their preliminary salutations and then Angus McBane came to council with the high chiefs of the realm.

Angus was a Civil Affairs officer. Nominally he was a colonial officer, but three years of special training and five more of service in CA had somehow removed him from the ordinary. He forgot to polish his buttons now. He had become gentle with years of dealing with less sentient races. He had spent a long time out beyond the last scout field and the life had changed him from the ordinary.

He clung to a stick as a symbol of a gentleman. But his *topee* was a disgrace and his tunic pockets bulged and he had found that mastodon hide boots were best.

He squatted down at the council, cross-legged, his black and gold stick across his knees, his bold Scot face sharply white in contrast to his uncut hair, his wise eyes bright in the firelight. Behind him knelt Dirk who had the largest mechanical sense and the least conscience of any non-com in the service.

The place smelled bad and the people smelled worse. They were humanoid and one would have thought them more than that until he looked at their feet and hands. Where there were claws, there should have been nails. And there was much too much hair on them. But they were sentient, oddly so, and their speech, filtered through the translating filter, was full of startling strength.

"You say you come to bring us blessings," said the ruling chief. "We have blessings. You say you can teach us many things. We know many things. You say you have much to give and you give nothing!"

The chief threw the trinkets into the fire, a magnifying glass and a chain of gold coins. Angus McBane showed no emotion about it. He looked at the men there, saw signs of disease and malnutrition, looked back at the chief.

"I can show you many ways to grow good food. I can cure a thousand sicknesses. I can prepare aids which will make your work less. I bring peace and plenty. Do not despise my gifts."

"You want this valley," said the chief, rearing up seven feet tall and glaring. "You want my people should enter your slavery. Your looking-over vessels came. This was not the first time we had seen your race. Five men of the looking-over vessel did not go back. We have no reason not to detain six."

"You must not talk like children," said Angus, aware that knives had shifted. "We want the rights to mine a rock on your planet. You may retain your own government. But I have many things to give. I can show you how to raise food, good food, lots of food, food that is good to eat, I can build you ways to bring water into your villages. I can take away your sicknesses. I can do many powerful things for you and you will not have to pay."

The tribal chief expanded his chest and glared around him at his fellow councilmen. He read their mood.

"What power do you have that we do not have?" said the chief.

"It is a thing we call science," said Angus patiently. "With it we build such things as the ship in which we came. It will do many great things. It can make light appear in the night and it can keep beds dry when it rains. It can produce better children and it can make everyone wise. It can—"

"You say this *science* is powerful. Perhaps," said the chief, glowering, "you do not know that we also have a thing which is power."

"What is this thing?" said Angus.

A queer, clacking sound came and a sleek, fat fellow rose from beside the fire. He grinned with superiority and then, with a glance at the chief, waved his hand through the air.

Instantly a banner of light glowed there and then began to materialize into a form. Several near the fire scuttled back. Sergeant Dirk's rum-bleared eyes shot wide. A woman was taking form there, comely save for her claws. She floated upon the air and then abruptly dropped to the floor. She sat up, dazed, looked at the fire-painted faces, at Angus and hurriedly rushed from the council hut.

The sleek, fat youth sat down.

"Power," said the chief. "We have power. Is science greater than this magic?"

Angus McBane pushed at a live coal with his cane. He looked up after a little and there was a smile on his mouth. "Science is more

powerful than this. It is more powerful than any magic. Its laws are greater laws than magic's laws. Science is more powerful than this."

Some seemed afraid of him then. But most of them were cued by the chief who was arrogant with disdain.

"If science is so great, I would know it. But nothing is greater than magic. I would like to see a thing greater than magic."

"I would be glad to show you," said Angus. He took out a pocket light and turned it on, lighting up the entire hut. But when he shut it off, the sleek youth waved his hand and the hut became twice as light.

The chief laughed. "Is there no more to your science?"

"There is much more," said Angus. "Science can do anything which this young man's magic can do."

There was a titter of disbelief. Sergeant Dirk moved back a pace, the better to wield a morning-star of his own manufacture in case the going got rough.

"Magic can drive people mad," said the chief.

"Science can make people sane," said Angus.

"In any contest with magic," suddenly announced the fat young man, grown very proud, "your science would lose."

Angus looked straight across the fire at the round, greasy face of the self-styled magician. "If we were to engage in a contest, I should beat you."

The young man leaped up in triumph. "He has declared it. He has called the challenge and he is the challenger. Behold, I call you all to witness. These people would come upon us and rob and kill us but their science is not great. Here is one who challenges me! I accept the challenge!" He sat down promptly.

The chief smiled and his eyes glittered with a sporting thirst. "You have challenged, newcomer. It shall be arranged. When two warriors of our people disagree, they fight before all. You shall fight against our Taubo, he whom you have challenged. You have your rights. You shall fight."

Angus sighed but he nodded.

"You are aware of our rules?" said the chief.

"I am not," said Angus.

"Then I shall dictate the rules of this contest. Taubo shall have the morning in which to destroy you with his magic. You shall have the afternoon to destroy him with your science. Then so shall it be proved."

Sergeant Dirk tugged at Angus' shoulder. "Pull out, sir. It'll be poison and no chaser. I'll—" He stopped at his boss' quick glance.

Angus thought for awhile and poked a coal with the end of his cane. Then he looked at the chief and said, "I accept this 'contest.' " He stood up and bowed to the young man. "I wish you every success," he said ironically and, turning on his heel, left the hut.

The word raced across the gigantic valley and for a week outlanders poured into the center, bringing with them scanty provisions but a voracious curiosity. They came (dragging children and weird animals, to aid in the erection of a brush amphitheater, to gossip all day and dance all night, and to gawp about the *Argus* 48 and be kept at a distance by the marines.

The dust was thick, even within the ship, and Angus McBane wore a bandana across the lower part of his face as he read. He had to lift the bandana to sip at a drink and he occasionally had to lift his eyes from print to make some answer to Sergeant Dirk toiling in the room beyond.

Dirk had come into the marine corps under sentence never to be seen in civilian clothes again. He had left his right name behind but he had brought his ingenuity. Now and again some glimpse of his past would come up when a job needed to be done. But it was only a glimpse, like a curtain flicked back for an instant upon a long and gore-spattered corridor, and Angus never inquired.

Too tough even for the corps, Dirk had been shunted to Civil Affairs, that catch-all for odd men and odder jobs, and under Angus McBane he had managed to keep reasonably out of trouble. This was because he had found in his calloused and sin-choked heart, an affection for the officer. Time and again Angus had raked him out of drunk tanks and sent him back to duty without a tour in the infamous "dancing school" and Dirk, out of continually mounting gratitude, fondly supposed that he had shielded Angus from the facts of life.

When he lifted his eyes, Angus could see the jagged peaks which bounded the north of the valley and the rolling, dusty, scrub-covered lands which intervened. The place could be fertile, if these people could be coerced into the practices of agriculture. It was a wonder they had not discovered that their hunter society had begun to fail a century or two ago. They practiced infanticide and senicide to keep their population down to near food production level and yet they

left untended better than ten thousand square miles of arable land. Such things irked Angus. Professionally, he was supposed to be indifferent to these things. But he was not. They distressed him.

"—so I says to this girl, 'Baby, if it's money that's worryin' you, take a look.' And then I found myself in a gutter with a headache and that's how I come to distrust wimmen," narrated Dirk. "The more sweet and beautiful they appear, the more I distrusts 'em. You got to be careful." He was busy with a small set of cogs which were entirely swallowed in his enormous hands. "Aw, you ain't listenin'."

"Sergeant," said Angus, "We can do a lot for these people."

Dirk looked out the port at the dusty land and the throng of gaping, multi-colored "goonies." He looked at his officer. "If you ast me, a dose of ray would cure 'em best. Sir, they got about as much heart as a Jack Ketch. They revels at the sight of blood and howls in glee at the screams of the dead and dyin'. They're an outlandish and immoral lot of swine!"

"I am sure you are an authority on morals, Sergeant. But the dose of ray you suggest would turn this place into a new nova."

"You kiddin'?"

"I am sure I am not," said Angus.

"Then you better not let Edwards run that guard by hisself. *He* ain't got any sense."

"There isn't a loaded gun on board," said Angus. "And not one round."

Dirk looked through the port at the crowding, jostling humanoids. He looked at the dangling weapons, the filed teeth and the rolling eyes. He swallowed, coughed his chew of tobacco back up and spat in confusion. "That's why the scouts left their dead behind!"

"Right," said Angus. "Here comes the chief."

That dignitary was being carried on a litter of animal skins to the ship. His guards clubbed the crowd away, walked on a body or two and came to a halt at the airlock.

The chief lowered his seven foot bulk to the ground and entered the ship. He was not dismayed by the machinery. You couldn't hunt with it and so it was subject only to contempt.

"Taubo ready in the morning."

"That is a day early," said Angus.

"Taubo ready in the morning," said the chief.

They bowed. The chief got back on his litter and was carried away.

The stricken lay where they had fallen, trodden down again by the curious.

"Civilize 'em!" said Dirk. "Give me twenty men and fixed bayonets and I'll civilize 'em. We won't be ready by morning!"

"We will," said Angus, putting the book aside. "Indeed we will."

The brush arena was jammed, presenting a wall of faces and a surge of odors which would have overpowered a lion. Three thousand humanoids had turned out this day to witness Taubo present a display of his powers and to howl over the downfall of the strange invaders. Deltoid had turned Mandrel's light above the rim and the far mountains were washed with pink. The dust had been settled by sprayings of water and pennons hung at either side of the arena.

Taubo came with his assistants. He was a wily young man, Taubo. He had succeeded his teacher and the former head of his profession by a very effective dose of poison and his followers, knowing it well, served him with deference which, while it was not devotion, was at least efficient dignity.

The group toured the arena and then, in the center, Taubo leaped up, flung wide his arms and let loose a dreadful screech. It was a well practiced screech and it would nearly deafen at five feet. It started high and went higher and it had volume enough to satisfy the most savage. But it had more purpose than mere satisfaction. Many a victim had been paralyzed into complete obedience by that screech.

The crowd was instantly silent.

"I am Taubo!" cried the magician. "I come to show the invader of my power so that he will forever be afraid to come to us again from beyond the mountains. I am Taubo! I drink fresh blood and I dine on new-born children! One sight of my magic and the strongest sicken. One blast of my breath and men die. I am Taubo. My magic protects us from becoming slaves. *I shall conquer!*"

That was most satisfying to them all and, when they had recovered a little from fright, they cheered and cheered, beating wooden lances against hide shields and waving skins in the air.

But this had to end. They expected something very spectacular from the other pennon. A small knot of human beings had been gathered there since the first streaks of dawn. They had a raised curtain and from time to time one or another glanced into it.

Taubo became brave. He capered toward the humans, shouting

for them to come forth and let him have his will of them, promising things which were truly blood-laking. Taubo ran back again to the seated chiefs.

"Make them come forth! They are cowards. Make them come! I will strike them where they are if they do not start!"

A chief raised a hand and a horn blew for silence.

"Come forth, invaders!" commanded the chief.

Three thousand pairs of humanoid eyes watched the curtain. It twitched. A form walked forth, calmly, certainly, carrying a chair and a book, and the crowd recognized the leader of the invaders.

The invader's cane was tucked under his arm and he seemed to be neither impressed nor hurried. He put the chair down in the exact center of the arena and sat upon it. He put the cane across his knees and he opened a book. And then calmly, very calmly, he began to scan the pages with a quiet eye.

Taubo leaped forward. He paused only long enough to wave his arms in salute to the crowd and then he went to work. Coming to within a foot of the invader's ear he let loose a screech which rocked the first rows. It was long, loud and deafening.

The quiet eyes continued to scan the pages.

Taubo let go a howl of disappointment which was not part of his program. He backed up. Then he reached a hand toward a follower and took a wand.

Two of his people began to beat upon a drum and the shocks of it were physical. Close up they were enough to stop a heart, properly directed. Taubo waved the wand. A curtain of fire began to play about the invader's head.

After a few minutes of this, a woman and an old man in the near rows fell out of their seats, insensible.

The drumming continued, grew louder, the whole force of it solidly directed at the breast of the quiet reader. The lightning played and crackled, set fire to a tunic of one of Taubo's followers and had to be put out.

For half an hour the beating continued.

The invader turned pages calmly.

"You Anguish!" screamed Taubo. "You wait. I fix you!"

Taubo was becoming angry. He pulled forth an incense pot and he put some coals into it from a fire near his pennon. His followers knew now not to get downwind of that pot. One whiff and a man

would die. Taubo dropped some powder into it and blue flames and dense clouds began to roll, clouds which Taubo avoided.

The engulfing smoke bore down upon the seated invader, swallowed him up from sight, drifted across the field and abruptly and with agony killed a wandering dog. It reached the arena edge and a man leaped up and clawed, his throat bleeding. The area of the smoke was hastily cleared.

The charge in the pot sputtered out. Taubo stared.

Another page was being turned!

After a frenzy of rage in which he beat two followers, Taubo came back to his business at hand. He made a number of incantations, driving them home with flashes of light from his wand. He did not expect these would have any effect but they were good showmanship. Then he trotted back and gingerly scooped up a small spade of gray powder. He carefully touched none of it. It was culled from a certain bush and when distilled, a pinch of it on the skin caused an exquisite and rapid dying.

Taubo capered, careful of the powder, and made further loud incantations, interspersed with numerous shrieks and wailings which were orders to the demons of the place to do their worst.

He dashed in suddenly, tipped the spade and showered a cascade of violent poison over his enemy.

Gleeful now, Taubo capered back, expecting an instantaneous effect, since the powder had touched the face and the hands.

The invader tipped the book to clear the print, put the volume back on his knees, and went on reading!

The crowd was becoming a little restless. The sun was rather high now and they had not come to see a magician dance but an invader die. That imperturbable figure was beginning to wear upon them almost as much as it did on Taubo. They had seen magic operate before!

Taubo withdrew. For a long time he took advice with his followers and finally decided upon the final trick.

He had planted, that morning, a number of very tindery bushes underneath the sand and he had saturated them with an oil which burned furiously. He had not thought he would have to use this trick, but the time was at hand.

Taubo marched forth with a loud beating of drums and delivered a wailing chant which again captured his audience. He capered about

the reading invader and raced to the points of a star he was drawing on the ground with a wand.

When he had finished a long show of this, he gave an imperceptible signal to a follower and suddenly pointed his wand at a point of the star.

Flame burst.

To the crowd it appeared as though the ground itself was on fire. The smoke rolled and the flames rose pale yellow and smoking in the daylight. At the exact center of the star sat the reader of books.

The fire swept forward, leaped higher. It came to the invader's toes. The drums rolled a heavy, rising storm. The flames went under the invader's feet! Then the smoke was thick and the crowd could not see. But the chair was charring. The entire star was burning in the sand. It was obvious that nothing human could live in that "magic" fire!

Slowly the spent flames died down. The smoke blew aside. Taubo stared.

The invader turned another page!

The entire area came to its feet with a moan. Taubo started forward. He was becoming red in the face. He had his wand lifted to strike and the shaking tension within tore at him. He moved another step forward, wand still raised. And then he fell, headlong, dead.

If those three thousand humanoids could have moved they would have done so. They could not. From terror they stood as though tied.

The invader glanced up at the sun, saw that it was overhead and rose from the chair. Finger keeping his place he walked straight toward the pennons which marked his side. He passed into the curtain and out of sight.

The crowd, chiefs and all, would have run away if Angus had not instantly come out. He marched straight to the bank of notables.

His hair was wet with sweat, his face was black with grime. He stopped and looked at the chiefs.

"You have seen how impervious science is to magic," he said. "I ask you to concede that I have won and that all my demands must therefore be fulfilled. I shall not kill you. I shall help you, for science does not kill, it saves. Do you acknowledge my sovereignty on this planet in the name of the Galactic Council and the Civil Affairs Branch of the Military Defense?"

They took in his words. They realized that he was not that instant going to kill them. And then they looked at the body of Taubo and

sensed somehow that they were free of a thing they could not describe.

They looked at Angus McBane with his lank black hair and his soiled tunic and his cane and suddenly, as the chiefs rose to assent, the humanoids began to cheer. They cheered louder and louder and babies cried and dogs barked and sound rose in an enthusiasm which was loud enough to be physical force.

"You hear the people," said the high chief. "I hear the people. We acknowledge your science and assent to your rule. You are our lord and your person is sacred unto us forever more."

Angus bowed and walked back through the swelling din to the curtains and the enclosure.

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That evening Angus McBane, Civil Affairs, sent off a laconic dispatch to his superiors.

"DELTOIDS WILL NOT OBJECT TO MINING
OPERATIONS. EQUIPMENT MAY BE SENT
AT ANY TIME. McBANE."

In the machine shop, meanwhile, of the *Argus* 48 Sergeant Dirk finished his careful neutralizing, according to McBane's directions, of the robot McBane had designed and he had built. It was not a very good likeness of McBane anyway and besides they needed the parts. McBane regretted the destruction of one perfectly good book.

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Any similarity between this story and recent events
may be strictly intentional

THE NOVA INCIDENT

(A SERIES OF DISPATCHES ON THE
DEVELOPMENT OF PEACE TALKS)

By CHARLES NUETZEL

22, June, 2101, Danton, (IWN): The President of the United Federation of Planets arrived at the Danton Capital early this morning. All questions on the war were immediately countered with one of John J. Jennings' famous smiles and a "no comment!" When asked if he expected a settlement soon with the aliens, he did offer this:

"We are willing, at great expense to our Federation and the Solar System, to continue the war as long as necessary in order to be in the best bargaining position. The opposition is well aware of this from the last offensive they made on Kartion III. Our positions, hard held, will continue to be held at all cost. It is our opinion that talks will begin in a very short time. We are, after all, winning."

A reporter inquired why he felt we were winning, since the aliens had in two months taken several Federation planets. He merely said: "Your President has classified information that reveals a different picture on the real situation."

This statement was made one hour before the unexpected and total defeat of the Federation forces at Kartion III.

A General—to be nameless—said, after the announced defeat: "While I can't claim we are winning, I feel that JJJ must have knowledge unknown to the military—at least this officer. That would explain his unyielding hard-line."

23, June, 2101, Pluto (IWN): In an interview with the press at Martsville, Professor David Sherman Chan, well-known expert on alien culture, was asked: "What is the basic problem facing the President in regard to the aliens?"

The white-haired professor fondled his pointed gray-beard, stared through thick glasses and said in his slow drawl: "One

has to understand the alien culture in order to know why they must have their demands honored in public. Pride.

"The remarkable fact is that for some eighty years we have lived side by side, exchanging scientific and cultural knowledge, building a mutually satisfactory import and export exchange.

"It was probably lucky that the aliens are physically not so different as to be repulsive. They are bi-peds, bi-sexual, with a face organized much along the same lines, with only color and lack of hair being any real basic or dramatic difference. While the green and blue shadings of their races seem strange, they are hardly repellant—obvious from the fad that followed the first years of contact when our women covered their skins with make-up to match the coloring of the aliens.

"What is not so well-known is that the aliens, culturally and psychologically, are very much like humans in the matter of pride, very possibly even more so.

"We are dealing here, in fact, with the first confrontation of cultural pride. They have a very simple logic in such matters and it is to be expected that they would react as violently as they have.

"It is my opinion that if our president would bend to their demands in the proper way, all else might fall into place.

"I have told the President that if he were able to find a middle road, where their pride would be satisfied, without weakening our position of apparent or real power, he would probably find it easy to bring about a rapid settlement.

"In other words, to conclude, gentlemen, the middle road of strength is not easy. A means must, in the end, be found to satisfy their pride without hurting our own. I hope that makes it quite clear."

24, June, 2101, Danton, (IWN): JJJ called an emergency meeting of his staff here on the Danton system. They remained in conference for over an hour, then his press secretary Gordon G. Gordon made the following statement.

"The President received an official message this morning stating that if we were willing to make certain public admissions—statements that would be outright lies—peace talks might follow. The President has sent the following to their Chief Head:

"We find your statements about the act of the ship *Nova*, and so-called aggressive acts against your people, as totally at odds with our own information.

"While it is our wish to end this ruthless killing before it becomes a total conflict, it is out of the question until your gov-

ernment realizes that the only way to peace is a mutual gathering of our heads of state and a serious attempt to understand one another's problems. We feel compelled to say that while the action of the pirate ship *Nova* was unsound, it was not an official representative of our government, and we are doing everything possible to bring those responsible to justice. But the militant action by your government was an aggressive act against our own people in the attack and capture of a planet of our Federation, and the murder of military personnel and confining of all civilians. Such acts were against the people of our Federation, a political and cultural move of aggression that must be considered an act of war.

"Our sole purpose of coming some 10 light-years to the planet Danton, whose system has been since invaded by your forces, was to begin peace talks. We demand immediate withdrawal of your forces from this system as a sign of your willingness to seek a peaceful solution to the situation both our governments now face."

24, June, 2101, Earth, (IWN): Reactions to the President's exchange with the alien government this day were, as expected, diverse, here at Capital City.

Senator Channing, well-known for his opposition to JJJ's last election, said: "I must admit to some surprise at his continued hard stand. He doesn't seem in a position to made demands, considering the fact that Danton is surrounded by alien forces. Yet, alien psychology is a wonder to behold, to say nothing of our president's. Though I am morally required to say this: It is obvious that the President has some surprises up his rocket tubes. What they might be, we at Capital City are not privy to."

Donsisky, Senator from the Eastern Complex, was a little more direct: "I believe he has no way of knowing the total power of the aliens, as is apparent from the series of defeats we have experienced under his leadership. It would have been far more effective if he had, at the beginning, launched a massive cobalt attack on their home planet and system. Of course, it is too late to make this kind of move with any real great effect. But I must admit that the President's hard stand is admirable."

But the surprising statement came from one of his own party leaders, Senator Fredericks of the Republic of South and North America. "Having known John for some 50 years, and being in close contact with his political growth I find it typical for him to believe that a strong, firm, unyielding stand is the only way to victory. Some have called him ruthless. In his ten years in

the office of the Presidency it has been his continued habit to never back down, no matter what the odds against him might be. Nonetheless, there are times when we must admit the reality of a situation. To be quite frank, I can't imagine what secret weapon gives him the courage to hold fast to a tough, no-bending line. If there is some secret lever, he is playing a good game of stellar poker. If, on the other hand, he is at his old game of bluffing against losing odds, he's a very bad Judge of the opposition and a terrible poker player—and God help us!"

25, June, 2101, Danton, (IWN): The official statement of the alien government to the President's demands reported here last night is as follows:

"As long as your government continues to show such a lack of honest willingness to cooperate in developing a mutually satisfactory situation that might offer solid grounds for setting up realistic considerations for peace talks, we will now discontinue all efforts in this direction."

The President appeared before the press this evening to say: "I find their attitude puzzling. But as far as this government is concerned, we feel justified in our demands and will stand firm. We will continue our defensive and continue to hold our position."

It was made immediately before our defeat in space at the battle of the Three Suns. Nobody here knows for sure if the President was at the time aware of the coming defeat.

25, June, 2101, Earth, (IWN): The following incomplete message was received from our presidential correspondent.

"The unexpected attack on Danton by the alien space fleet has left the planet and its population in a state of shock since its beginnings a few hours ago. As we stand here recording this report, the sound of distant battle is loud in our ears. We have heard that the President and his staff are already making plans for the immediate lift-off to an unnamed planet."

The message was broken off at this point and we, at Interplanetary World News, are at a loss to know what happened to interrupt it so suddenly and without any explanation. We have received reports that the planet Danton was taken in one bold stroke by the aliens, within a few hours of their attack.

27, June, 2101, Unknown, (IWN): My last report was cut short by the announced alien break-through into the capital city of Danton and the immediate offer of withdrawal on the President's ship for all news correspondents. Until now we have been isolated from all communication outlets. We are deep within the surface of an unnamed planet, which is atmosphere free, well

protected from any outer attack by very powerful laser screens.

The President remained isolated with his staff until early this morning when he ordered a gathering of those reporters who came with him. The following is his statement.

"The attack on Danton and our necessary retreat have not in any way changed the position of our government. We are quite able to defeat the aliens in an all-out conflict. There is no reason to back down one word of our original statements to their government.

"However, I have received a message from the alien government, which says in part:

"'It is our wish to end this conflict. Admit to aggressions against our people in the unwarranted attack of your spy ship *Nova* upon one of our freighters. Refusal on your part is considered a sign of your unwillingness to find peaceful alternatives.

"I sent the following answer: 'Your unprovoked attack on Danton and the implied attempt to capture or kill the President of the Federation is deplorable. Unless you stop this fighting, return our planets, we will take them back by force.'

"We are not fighting this war over the issue of the *Nova*," he continued to tell us, "but over the total concept that *no* government, human or alien, has the right to attack and capture a planet by force.

"On Earth we learned this lesson after bitter years of Cold War conflict. Since then the World Government expanded to Solar government, then with the united knowledge and efforts of *all* Mankind we were able to create a star drive.

"Man has in the last hundred years learned not only to live in peace with himself, but to accept the concept that there are other intelligent creatures in the Universe and we have room in our hearts to embrace all forms of intelligent life and live side-by-side with them. But as equals—on terms that will profit both sides equally.

"We have attempted to restrain ourselves. I, as your President, have not been blinded to the realities of the problem now facing us. I am aware there are many, our Vice President for one, who would have attacked immediately in force. Instead, I've tried to learn from the lessons of the past and restrain my hand.

"It would have easy to say we were in the wrong, but such an admission would not be taking into account that the enemy, without warning, struck at our Federation with military might. We cannot allow this to go unchallenged. It is necessary to show

the alien authorities that if they have a complaint they should come to us, sitting down like intelligent, rational beings, and seeking a logical, intelligent and rational solution. It is a two-way street.

"Friendship, but with the solid understanding that it is given freely, not demanded. Co-existence, side by side, as mutually equal partners, with mutual respect.

"I have avoided attacking any populated planet of theirs on the principle that it is immoral. But since they continue aggression, we must follow their example. We are now in the process of revealing at what cost they have taken Federation planets.

"Our forces are at this very moment attacking their capital system of Mjio, an order that I reluctantly was forced to make."

28, June, 2101, Unknown, (IWN): The President, when he arrived at a press conference this morning, called unexpectedly at 0605, looked haggard.

Gordon G. Gordon made the following announcement before the President spoke: "We have received notice that our attack on Mjio was repelled and defeated. All our ships were either destroyed upon landing or taken captive. The alien government immediately sent this message:

"'We find it necessary to now make one simple demand: Surrender or an immediate counter-attack will take place on your home system.'

"Now the President."

President Jennings stepped forward, said: "We have obviously reached an impasse. Where the conflict up until now, has been a political and military game of chess, we are now facing all-out war. Our military advisors assure me that any attack on our solar system would be repelled, and would never be launched. It has also been reported that our defeat on Mjio was a miscalculation. We had used no more than the element of surprise and minor, planetary weapons. I can assure you that there is nothing to fear from the enemy. I have sent the following a few hours ago to their government:

"'While we have regretted the action of the ship *Nova* against your freighter, and admit it was uncalled for, and that the action on your part might have been, in part, justified, we still feel it would have been far better if you had notified this government, which would have taken action on its own—and in fact has—against the ship *Nova*. Your actions of aggression have been unprovoked attacks against our people.

"'We demand your surrender or we will make an all-out offen-

sive attack which will bring total war to your home planets. It is obvious that you are not interested in . . ."

At this point the President was interrupted by an aide who whispered rapidly in his ear.

JJJ turned and said in a tired voice: "Gentlemen, something has come up that calls for our immediate attention."

With that he left the room, followed by his staff. All attempts to learn what took place have been fruitless.

28, June, 2101, Earth, (IWN): A sudden and swift attack on our system has made us captive of the alien government. While all personal and private enterprise has been, in effect, left alone, the government itself and all its functions have been temporarily taken over by the alien military. What was left of our military space force took immediate flight, once defeat was certain. The following alien statement was sent to all news services.

"This last move on our part was taken in reluctance. We have sent an ultimatum to your president as follows:

"'A statement of apology concerning the *Nova* incident is demanded. This demonstration of our total power has been forced upon us. We will keep those planets taken in battle, other than your solar system, for a period of twenty of your years, in order to educate those colonies as to the true nature of our society and civilization. We wish peace talks. The decision is up to you.'"

No human government official is at liberty to make public statements, being confined under alien military guard.

29, June, 2101, Unknown, (IWN): The President appeared before the press and stated briefly: "We can either make our stand here and now, with the united military forces at our command or bend to the wishes of the enemy. Since they hold the trump rocket, and in order to avoid any further deaths on either side, I have sent this message:

"'All requests on your part will be met, under the following conditions: 1): A return of the Solar System be made immediate; 2): A withdrawal of your troops from that system; 3). Peace talks to be immediately brought into effect in order to arrange the withdrawal of all your forces from the planets taken since the beginning of the conflict. 4): That it is agreed at this time that no occupation will be forced upon such planets as suggested by your communication to us of 28, June.'"

30, June, 2101, Unknown, (IWN): The President was smiling when he appeared before the press this morning. He waved several pieces of paper in front of him as if holding a victory banner. His eyes twinkled in good humor as he said: "The

following communication, I am certain, will please you. We received this message early this morning:

" 'Conditions for peace talks as stated in your communication to our government are agreeable, except for the following points: We are willing to return those planets taken, once a fair price for the conflict has been leveled against your government. Before peace talks can begin, however, your remaining forces must disband. It must be agreed that some of the planets captured during this conflict will remain under our control. You will agree to all our demands without argument.'

"I answered in this way: 'I find it necessary to demand the following before peace talks can be entered into: 1): You will return total function to our military; 2): That a fair payment to you for war expenses will be settled only when peace talks are in progress.'

"Their answer was simply: 'Agree to terms.'"

It is enough to say that everybody in the room cheered our President. Some had tears in their eyes. In the end it would seem that the President's life-long habit of a hard-line paid off in seeming victory in the face of total defeat.

23, July, 2101, Danton, (IWN): The President came out of the first day of conference with the aliens, his face drawn in hard, tired lines. It was obvious that things hadn't gone well. He did, however, make this statement to the press:

"While the aliens have some advantage, considering their unexpected surprise attack on the solar system, and their turning the screw to force public announcements in favor to their unyielding point-of-view, I find it amazing how incredible their demands at this conference have become. While I can't state in public what these demands entail, I can say this: It is not the policy of this government—and *never* will be—to buckle under to the opposition; and while we did take a slight set-back last month before the peace talks, it will have no effect upon our present stand. If necessary, we'll use all the force possible to hold every inch of soil that our science and exploration has colonized."

One reporter asked if he could tell us exactly how far he was willing to go.

Flashing one of his famous victory smiles, JJJ said: "With things returned fairly much to the state of affairs as they were at the beginning of last month—plus the very satisfying fact that all the government officials of the Federation have now sworn total support to any move I might make—I can honestly

say we are certainly in an even better position to make any kind of demand we wish. The Federation has never so totally supported any political leader. After all, we have not lost a war and if I know the human race, it won't buckle under.

"As our honorable and powerful political opposition, in the voice of Senator Channing, stated after our diplomatic victory that brought about these hard won peace talks: 'The President is a hard man to do business with, but his present stand has certainly justified his position, as did his past record.' Coming from such a learned and respected voice, I find it highly satisfactory endorsement of a continuation of hard-lining it to the very bitter end."

Three hours later a public statement was made by a spokesman for the alien government.

"After long deliberation with your president, we have made it clear that in order to keep peace between our people we have only one of two choices: Reconquer in total and govern the human civilization, or retreat to the original borders that existed before the *Nova* incident. To avoid this, you have only to meet our demands. While we do not wish to conquer, we will not allow any doubt to be entertained that we are afraid of your Federation. The decision we left up to your President before closing the conference this afternoon.

"We are awaiting his official answer, sent through diplomatic channels, before taking any action of a military nature."

Knowing the President, and considering his statements to the press, the reporters are in agreement about one thing:

Considering his past record, and the total support he has suddenly gained from both government and public alike, it is hard to imagine that he will buckle under to the demands as presented today. Yet he seems to have no other choice.

We can't help wondering if it is possible that he will really hold firm as he has done in the past.

And is it possible that if he does so, the aliens will follow through with their threats?

The long silence from President Jennings and his staff has caused a great sense of concern here.

It is the serious hope of everybody in the official Presidential press that the middle road, one that will not make it necessary for the President to either admit to total defeat or force a total conquest by the aliens, will be found.

Like the aliens he has two choices. What we are waiting to learn is which one he will make.

People of The Valley

BY JIM HARMON

Mars had been their home for untold centuries, but their hearts were still on Earth — a world they'd never known.

ILLUSTRATED BY WALTER KOERSCHNER

COMMANDER Talbot gazed at the tiny marked faces of the instrument board and they swam before him like an anonymous crowd.

Mars, Mars, Mars. The thought bounced back and forth in the emptiness of his brain. He tried to read the atmosphere gauge. Mars. He squinted at the gravity meter. Mars. He focused on the air lock dial. Mars. He stepped back and ran a hand across his forehead. The hand shook and his head was feverish. Mars, Mars, Mars.

Talbot thinned his lips and steadied his hands on the instrument board. He looked out of the portal to the land that lay beyond the spaceship. The valley lay gashed out of black, and open like a wound on the face of this world. The thread of atmosphere sank into it and whipped along its length, leaving part of itself behind in the white crust of oxygen that clung to the sides of the angry slope.

"McIntosh!" he turned and called into the cavern of the rocket. His eyes went back to the dumb faces of the dials—and they burned with the sight of them. The *clip-clip-clip-clop* of footsteps sounded alongside of him and he said,

"Read the instruments. I left my glasses up front." He couldn't let them know, not for their sake. They needed him.

"Yes sir! Gravity Meter: 38 of Earth Norm," McIntosh's quiet, sure voice measured out, harsh and distant, like a public address system back home—on Earth. He recalled how the



last one he had heard had sounded. It was at the military field, with speeches and bands. But there had been others, like the one at the fair. Yes, a fair, with lots and lots of people and the smell of damp grass and the tangy odor of animals in the pens combined with the tinkle of music and blur of rainbow lights in spinning arcs.

But this was Mars, and Earth and its memories were long away. The distance between tearing away from Earth's jealous gravity and pitting themselves and their toy against overwhelming infinity and blasting, with stern rockets down, upon this barren immensity of sand and shadow. Mars, Mars, Mars. They were here, but they would never get back. He was incompetent—a failure, a nothing with metal stars of authority, lost, alone, afraid, helpless. But he couldn't let *them* know.

"Very good," he said, as he realized McIntosh had finished reading the dials. He willed his eyes to focus on this serious, lank young man. "Very good. Order the men into pressure suits. We'll explore the surface area within sight of the spaceship."

"Yes sir. Who shall I assign to the watch?"

"The watch?" *He* had forgotten about the watch. "Obviously Boggs. The pilot is the least essential man in the actual exploration. Think for yourself, McIntosh. I'm not blindly rank-happy." I'm not happy at all, said a small cynical voice inside him. I've got what I wanted; I'm on Mars. It would be enough if it were just myself, but there are the others—and I'll never get them back. I'm lost, they're lost.

McIntosh left him and returned with Forrest, Wing, and James. They were wearing parts of their pressure suits and carrying the rest of them. They were children, grown up enough to hide their anxiousness at Christmas time.

"Gentlemen," Commander Talbot said tightly, "we are about to become the first men to walk the sands of Mars." That was all he could say. The rest of the words were choked off in his throat. Silly speech out of a yellowed double-feature.

Talbot reached behind him and pulled his own suit from the locker in back. He slid into it as the men adjusted their gear. Just as he started to lower the crystal globe of his helmet, McIntosh handed him his black-rimmed glasses. He nodded curtly and caught the wide angles on his ears and pinched his nose with the pliant plastic. The scene became sharper but only increased its fleeting urgency. He lowered the helmet and clicked it secure.

The Commander stepped in front of the air lock.

"They're waiting for us," McIntosh said.

Talbot looked around sharply, thoughts of expectant posterity flashing across his mind. "Who?"

"Who? No one could be, I guess. Just a feeling. Like the planet has just been waiting for us to come along for a thousand years." McIntosh grinned self-consciously.

When they were a silent and awed hundred years across the black lifeless eternity of rock, Forrest turned back to the towering silver needle of space rocket, Goddard-Ley. "I bet they name a cigar after her."

"Man's First Words on the face of Mars," James said. "A fine——" and he fell out of sight, snapped away.

Commander Talbot rushed forward, his heart hammering. He stopped suddenly, churning his encumbered arms for balance. McIntosh caught his elbow and lifted him back from the edge of the chasm. It was all incredible and unreal.

Talbot dropped to his knees and eased his face over the brink of the black rim. His eyes soaked into an ebony blotter held edgewise before him, sharp and deep. Spinning, his head and

stomach went down. It felt as if his eyes were falling toward the relief of the bottom and his stomach was going after them and he would be, too, in another second. Then he saw the tiny, rolling insect. It was sliding and tumbling toward the almost rectangular rock formations at the bottom of the valley; it was James. He saw something else, and he turned away sick.

McIntosh said, "He's dead."

Talbot lifted his head slightly. "What? No, no, I doubt that the fall will kill him in this light gravity—if it doesn't break his helmet—and they're extremely tough. It isn't a sharp drop. It's like a ski slide, only in reverse, in black."

"Almost as black as space," said Forrest. "So black it's invisible. Right before you and it's hidden. It *hides*. His eyes danced unsteadily in the hard sunlight.

"We're going down after him, of course—Wing, Forrest and myself. You report back to the ship, McIntosh. Get a cable or something to haul us out of there."

"Yes sir." McIntosh turned away to carry out the order. They watched him disappear.

He would have preferred to have had McIntosh along instead of Forrest, Talbot thought, but he needed someone out of the trap whom he could trust completely. He nodded to the two men. "Hang over the edge, get as close to the wall as you can, and drop."

Talbot set the example and Forrest and Wing followed. The wailing, painful screech of metal on metal vibrated up to Talbot through his suit. It *was* a ski slide. Only instead of hearing the sharp whisper of air as they moved like a wind-driven feather over the dazzling white, they were dragged down by a weight that wasn't a weight into the blackness of death. It waited for them at the bottom, at the end.

The end was in sight for him. Talbot could see it ahead in his mind. There could be no trust or sympathy for middle-aged men who fancied they saw beautiful young girls beckoning to them from the barren, lifeless places of a dead planet, as he had thought he had seen while watching James fall. But even before that he had known he was finished. He knew all it took to complete him was the time for him to die on Mars. Die on Mars, die on Mars, die on Mars....

She watched them as they fell. She watched where the black slope cut into the gray sky. She watched as first one man, dressed in leather and ice, tumbled into her world, and then was followed by others. Happiness beat at her and told her

they had come, and they were going to take her—and her people—back home with them. But fear whispered around her. Not fear of the men, but fear of herself, of what she was.

But that was silly. She was Laura, and Laura was synonymous with being alive and loving people and laughing in the night, not anything to be afraid of. Still she was afraid.

After a time, the men rose lazily to their feet and examined each other as if each were new and strange. A pain so sharp it was pleasant surged through her. They had seen her.

Talbot gagged on the raw oxygen inside his helmet. She didn't go away; she was solid. Not a transparent phantom of the mind or trick photography. He tried to will her to be gone, but she stayed, tall and willowy and lovely—an impossibility in the starved, empty air of Mars. He forced the oxygen out of his lungs. There was only one thing to do,—‘one thing,’ rang the words inside his brain. Confess, resign, run!

He turned to James, the words in his mouth. He caught them before they passed his lips. James was staring into the valley, his eyes wide, as if fastened on the flickering purple shadows of some long gone film. He lifted a fumbling hand to his helmet. “Sir,” he said, “Sir, would you check my oxygen feed? Air starvation. Hallucinations.”

It was Wing who offered the reassurance. “She’s real.”

“*Certainly she’s real*,” shouted Commander Talbot. “James, I expect my men to have enough self-respect not to doubt their own senses. If you don’t trust yourself, how can you expect me to trust you?” Inside, he hated his hypocrisy but they had to have faith in him. They were lost in a strange world and they had to have faith in something. But his strong words couldn’t fill in the emptiness his own shallowness left.

“But *how* can she be real?” murmured James.

“I’ll find out,” Talbot said.

He walked towards her. She waited. He stopped in front of her and lifted his hand slowly, afraid to touch her because he feared still that there was nothing to touch. But there was. He ran his gauntlet over her arm and he found it was soft but real, smooth but tangible.

Suddenly, like summer lightning, revelation came to him and he clamped his hard fingers into the girl’s arm. The flesh *bent*.

Talbot walked back to his men. “Fingernails. She’s fingernail all over. Skin would freeze at these temperatures, so she’s grown a protective coat.”

The men looked back to the form of the woman in the distance. Still she waited.

"So that's what a Martian looks like," Wing said softly, his voice barely carrying over the helmet radios.

Commander Talbot shut his eyes against the sight of the woman and the blue stones behind her and the black slope beyond them. He breathed the air of his spacesuit and tasted steel and copper in it. He willed his body not to float off into the empty sky, digging his heels into the phantom gravity to hold on to the planet he had at last reached. "No," he said. "She's of Earth, a human being, a woman."

"Yes, I feel something like that too," Wing said.

Talbot held his eyes shut and remembered things he had never known. "A long time ago, a very long time ago, Earth had a civilization that covered the world and reached out to the stars, then tore its own heart out and died. It left people *here*."

James whistled. "That must have been before the Pyramids or the Ark." Somehow he didn't question the Commander's theory, as if he, too, had arrived at it by his own thinking.

"It couldn't be," Wing said uneasily. "The world is only some four thousand years old."

Talbot clamped his teeth and forced his legs not to run. If only he were competent to handle these situations. If only he weren't a fallible old man. "Look," he said in a rocklike voice.

There were more of them behind the woman, moving forward carefully, breathing barren air, walking inside insect cases of not-flesh. Men, women and children. And they were smiling, all smiling.

Through Talbot's mind flashed a detailed classification of smiles. The smile of the joyful, the smile of the madman, the smile of the contemptuously hostile, the smile of the sadistic killer, the smile that is a position of the facial muscles. These were definitely joyful.

"Let's get out of here," James said.

The woman spoke.

Wing glanced around wildly, helplessly. "What did she say?"

"Something about home, something about going back home," James answered.

Commander Talbot adjusted his outside amplifier carefully and said, "Yes, that's what I understood. I wonder how we knew? She wasn't speaking any language I have ever heard."

James stared at the advancing people. "Telepathy."

"No," Talbot said. "That's pure thought. I couldn't read her thoughts, just her emotions. Something about her said she

wanted to go home. I'd know the same thing if I saw a lost child crying to itself."

James turned to the commander. "Then how can I know her name? It's Laura."

"To you, to us. But to them it may be something entirely different. Laura corresponds to a phonetic and symbolic pattern of theirs."

The people moved forward, like a wind rippling across a field. *Home!* The thought, the word, beat against the crew of the ship. Talbot staggered under its load. Their hands pulled at the men. Old hands, young hands, alien hands.

"It might mean anything," Talbot continued. He pushed the hands away, and tried to push the idea out of his mind. But it remained. The one concept remained. They wanted to go home, to a home they had never seen and could never know.

Wing screamed. He screamed just once. After that, he didn't have the breath to scream. The hands of the crowd had pulled loose his air hose.

He died unpleasantly. He gasped, choked, turned color, first red, then purple. He clawed at his helmet, sank to one knee fell face forward, and died kicking. The kicking stopped.

They were sorry. They stood and radiated their sorrow, and confusion, and lack of understanding.

Run! The word screamed against Talbot's ears. He forced his head to turn from staring over his shoulder into the sun towards the twisted thing he had once called Wing. The word must have been said aloud for James started forward, crouching and throwing himself like a stone.

Talbot also ran. His legs worked very well, much better than they had under Earth gravity. His light footsteps smacked down satisfactorily. But his head snapped back into a familiar groove. He found himself staring over his shoulder into the sun towards the people who had been smothering the thing called Wing with their sorrow.

The girl, Laura, was running lightly and well. She led the others after them. It was a fine game, a custom they should politely observe before going Home.

Commander Talbot became aware of a fact. No matter how hard or fast or far he ran, the sun stayed exactly in the same place it was when Wing had died. He couldn't escape it. *There is no escape!* his mind told him dutifully—not for fallible incompetent old men. He hadn't been able to escape the failing reflexes that had grounded him as a test pilot, or the nervous frustration that distracted the lines of his drafting on Earth

by volunteering for the terror, hardship, and lasting glory of Mars. He had only doomed himself and his men. The sun followed him and stayed with him, like his own fear and responsibility.

Stop!

Talbot fought against his momentum and halted breathlessly before he realized that he had given the order. He saw James totter on one foot, ready to throw himself ahead again.

The people swarmed around them like happy children, but not so distant, not so remote.

Something inside Talbot tightened his jaw and caused him to step forward and grab Laura by the shoulders. He looked into her eyes and found them bottomless, like the valley had looked from above. He could lose himself in them.

"Laura," he said carefully through his outside amplifier. "Laura, you can't go Home, not ever. Because it isn't home to you and it never can be. Look at me! The thing over my head is there so that I can breathe *your* air. You would need one to be able to breathe on Earth. Look at yourself! Your fine clear plastic skin would crack and rot under Earth's heat and moisture, its humidity. *Here* is your home. Earth was the home of your ancestors long, long ago. It can never be *your* home."

Laura's eyes changed. It was the crying change, but without tears, without destructive warm moisture. She understood, like the rest of the people. Not the man's words, but that she could never go home.

Their emotion was like a low humming song, a dirge. For they were human—they were of Earth, and Mars was not their home.

Commander Talbot sucked in his breath, feeling the hurt in his chest. "Come on, James. We'll head back to the spot where we entered and see if McIntosh has a cable or something rigged up so we can climb out of here. Stop me if I'm wrong, but I think this is the way."

Laura walked along, holding Aaron's hand, because he needed someone to hold on to during the falling sickness, during the times when the land underfoot seemed unreal and without weight and you knew you were falling through all time and space. And she held to him because she needed to hold on to someone too.

"I'm falling," Aaron commented. "I'm falling....and why aren't we going home?"

She couldn't find the answer, so she walked on to Old Gordo's place, because he always had an answer. He had sat with his back against his blue dwelling and had agreed *they* were coming. This they had all known—in the same way they knew when they were sick, or lost or lonely. However, he had said that *they* would *not* take them home—and this they had not known. He would say something further now. He must.

She saw him now, sitting, thinking his long deep thoughts, his back against his dwelling.

Laura held Aaron's hand tighter and walked into the shadow of the old man. "What are we going to do now, Gordo? What will we do?"

Old Gordo said nothing.

Laura reached out and touched him. Still Gordo made no response.

She took her hand away and Old Gordo slumped forward to follow it. He became a crumpled pile of bronze in the black daylight of Mars.

She heard a loud noise in the sky and glanced up to see another, smaller sun, trailing a gleaming thrusting thing into the blackness above her. She wondered if it were a good thing or a bad thing for her people.

She looked down at Old Gordo and found her answer.

* * * * *

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

THE RUTHLESS MAN by Gerald W. Page. Graham was being remorselessly hunted as a traitor—but the fate awaiting him was the most unusual ever accorded a disloyal subject!

FATHER IMAGE by Basil Wells. Steal a spaceship and rule a world! A delusion suffered by one Roderik Hyne.

REQUIEM FOR PLANET X by George Hopkins. From another solar system this interloper had come—and it threatened to destroy the one thing Deriton Barry loved most.

Also the exciting conclusion of **RADIO MINDS OF MARS**, and other great science fiction stories—and, of course, another letter in Forrest J Ackerman's popular feature.

What incredible force could snatch a spaceship
out of space and leave not a trace?

EARTH'S LUCKY DAY

By FRANCIS FLAGG & FORREST J ACKERMAN

ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL

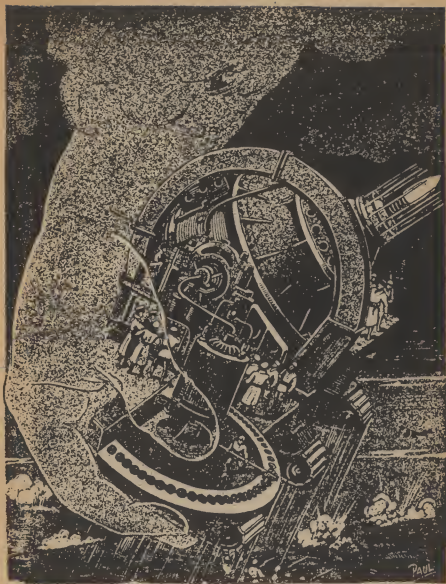
It was Hall Browning of Global News who coined the phrase, and he lived and died without ever knowing how ironical it was. In America, and even in the staid papers of London and Paris, it screamed from front-page headlines; and in papers everywhere, in every civilized country throughout the world (with the exception of those still under the sway of United Forces) it topped melodramatic articles, even if in smaller type and on inside pages.

Earth's Lucky Day, Hall Browning wrote and telecast and millions mouthed the phrase.

It was February 19, 1973, and the TV news dispatches and the tele-lino writers scattered the tidings to the four corners of the compass immediately following verification of the signal triumph of science, the glorious victory of International Armies, and hours before the world knew of the strange disappearances.

The world was in a ferment on that February day—and night..

It was day in America. Outside the fence that hemmed in the super-power plant and the huge stratosphere globe of glassite and steel, thousands of people milled and watched. So great was the press that at one place the fence collapsed and mounted police and soldiers had to drive back the crowd. Krell and his co-worker and fellow scientist, Maxwell Dredd, busied themselves with last minute details. Then they entered the huge globe their genius had devised and the door was sealed. A million eyes watched the giant globe as it rose, and a cry of awe and wonder burst forth. It was astounding to see such an immense man-made machine rise in the air as surely and swiftly as a rocket—but without visible evidence of propulsion.



(Illustration by Paul)

"You will note that the strange document implies the visitors to have been of colossal size."

"Lord," said a stout man, mopping his brow with a handkerchief, "what if the power were to fail!" and a girl said to her boyfriend. "Think of it; they're being lifted on—what do you call it?—an energy beam."

"Yeah," he said, "something like that. It's—it's stupendous."

The huge globe rose higher and higher, glinting in the sun, dazzling the eyes that watched, every moment dwindling in size, until it was a toy balloon, a plum, a marble. "I see it," yelled a small boy. "I do, I do! Just a speck." And people with opera glasses and binoculars focused them aloft; but soon the globe had lifted beyond even their power to visualize, and disappeared into the blue immensity of space, higher than man had ever risen before without rockets. Krell and Dredd looked at their instruments and then regarded each other in triumph. Dredd regulated the flow from the oxygen tanks. Both men looked through curved glassite windows at black, star-pricked space, so black, so vacuous-looking. The globe was stationary at its maximum altitude; the rod of energy could lift it no farther. In video communication with the power station so far beneath them, Krell answered anxious inquiries.

"O.K. so far. Both of us feel fine. The air somewhat close and heavy. Colder." He signed off and busied himself noting the figures of a half-hundred delicate instruments which registered atmospheric density, temperature outside the globe, and the action of cosmic rays. The powerful new-principle telescope carried by the globe was turned upon interesting stars and planets which were viewed with a clarity never before witnessed by man. Cosmic pictures were taken.

From earth, the observers at the power station called again, anxiously. "Dredd, Krell."

Dredd answered this time. "Globe speaking." Methodically he gave certain instrument reading, certain observational data; and then, in the midst of a sentence, stopped abruptly.

When next the power station achieved communication with the globe, it was Krell speaking. "Dredd called away by momentary disturbance in the thin outside atmosphere; temperature rose a degree and a fraction; for an instant there was a blur or something like it before the telescope; we are puzzled by such phenomena happening all at once. Ah—just a moment!" His voice sounded as if he'd turned away from the mike. "What's that, Dredd? The blur again." Then suddenly: "On earth there! —on earth—my God!" His voice went up—up, then ceased with a snap.

In vain the observers at the power station called frantically, "What is it? What's the matter? Krell! Dredd!" Ominous silence was the only answer; and when the power was reversed and the rod of energy lowered to earth, nothing came with it—nothing. Far above the clouds, in the thin cold regions of the stratosphere, the globe and the pioneers within it had disappeared!

On the same day that the globe rose into the stratosphere, at the same time, though not at the same hour, utilizing the self-same principle of the rod of energy generated in a compact motor as an invisible piston, functioning with tremendous speed and little friction, Lewis Drake, the black mechanical genius, demonstrated the infinite possibilities of his new type of streamlined car and so paved the way for the obsolescence of older and slower methods of transportation.

The vehicle itself, 30 feet in length, shaped somewhat like a slim torpedo, but with oddly grooved sides and top, and with an undercarriage consisting of a single runner and imbedded in a grooved track and cushioned with compressed air, was an object of intense interest, not alone to thousands of casual spectators but to keen-eyed engineers from international countries. It was well-known that Danvers, Incorporated (which was but another name for the autonomous governments of Canada, the United States, Mexico, and the South American Republics) was financing the venture.

The single-grooved track, describing an immense circle 1200 miles in circumference and running through a half dozen central states, had taken a huge sum to build. Here too, as in the case of the stratosphere globe, police, foot and mounted, and regiments of soldiers had difficulty in controlling the crowd. For a time it seemed as though the car itself was in danger from the mob. However, the authorities had taken the precaution of placing loudspeakers at strategic points before the people gathered, and Drake himself, speaking into a microphone, pled with men and women to be quiet and orderly, to stand in their places and not to endanger their lives or his machine. This materially aided in calming the enthusiasm, the rising hysteria, and allowed the police and soldiers to control the situation.

Drake, who was not only a famous engineer but somewhat of an orator as well, spoke at length of his invention. "Not for wealth alone," he said in part, "or merely for empty honor but to bind more closely in peace and harmony the various countries and races of men, am I striving to promote more and yet more

speed in methods of transportation. Anything that brings distant people within a few hours' travel of each other makes for tolerance and understanding." He reminded of various speed records, beginning with the primitive streamlined train, *Zephyr*, in 1934 which reached a maximum of 104 miles an hour in a run from New York to Chicago; of the later *Thunderbolt* in its run from Moscow to Kiev; and how he himself, in '72, in *Lightning One*, had doubled the previous world record. All these were land records," he emphasized. Winged man, jetplanes, set records in machs and miles per second.

"Today," he said, "I hope to demonstrate in this go-devil of mine, the *Lightning Two*, speed in excess of 1000 miles an hour as a safe and feasible way of land travel." With that, he bowed his thanks to the tremendous and deafening waves of applause and entered the hermetically enclosed compartment of his car. His assistant started the secondary motor and the strangely shaped and fluted craft, *Lightning Two* looming large in gold letters on its silvery side, commenced to move. The noonday sun glinted on its body of dulled metal and silver, and reporters shouted into phones, "Drake enters his car; the door is sealed; the car moves; listen to that crowd roar! The police can't control it! It's breaking through. If the car doesn't get away—quick— But she's off! —she's off——"

And she *was* off.

Inside the car, Drake had taken the controls and started the energy rod piston. In the sealed-in gyroscopically-hung cabin neither he nor his assistant could tell they were moving. Only the instruments on the operating panel attested to the fact.

At the official starting station a hundred miles down the line, they saw a blur go by and the electronically-controlled starting bell clanged and the automatic stopwatches noted the time with an accuracy unhuman.

All along the 1200 miles of curving track spectators crowded—in the rural districts and occasional villages, knots of country-folk and farmhands—in the large cities and their environs, crowds running into the hundreds of thousands. Bells clanged officially to note the passing but no human eyes could see the speeding demon, smoothly, silently, hurtling by.

Twelve hundred miles an hour!

Even in the hermetically enclosed cabin, whose slightest sway denoted movement at all, Drake glanced at his speedometer with pale face and half-incredulous eyes. At the official starting

station the observers went wild. The high-salaried scribes and famous broadcasters yelled into their phones:

"TWELVE HUNDRED MILES IN ONE HOUR!"

"DRAKE SMASHES ALL LAND SPEED RECORDS!"

"BLACKAMERICAN DESTROYS DISTANCE!"

But such super speed, once attained, cannot be braked in a league, or 20 leagues. Though Drake shut off his energy-rod piston, the car hurtled three hundred more miles before spectators glimpsed it as a blur; and it was at Eureka, a small town of 40,000 inhabitants, that the incredible incident occurred.

It must be made clear at this point that the hurtling car was seen more or less clearly by thousands of people; photographic plates attest to this, and furthermore Drake and his assistant were alive at the time. The car was equipped with a radio and, doubtless relaxing in the moment of triumph from the concentration and anxiety which must have gripped him until then, Drake chose that particular 30 seconds to broadcast a message. Hundreds of receiving sets picked it up; and there can be little doubt that it was the Black Genius talking; for there could be no mistaking his distinctive voice, with its cultured enunciation. Furthermore, the fragmentary message was preceded with the identification "*Lightning Two* speaking—*Lightning Two*," and then: "We are safe and fine; no inconvenience from stupendous speed; transportation is"

But the message was never finished. It was at that moment the weird, the uncanny thing happened. People mention feeling a wave of heat "like the breath from a furnace." Moreover, instruments in a local weather bureau showed that at that moment there was an actual increase in heat of a full degree. Then they saw the blur, the shadow. For an appreciable instant the sunlight darkened. The blur seemed to encompass the speeding car. When it lifted, the car was gone.

At first, naturally enough, it was believed that Drake had increased his speed for some unknown reason; but along that 1200 miles of circular track no bells rang to tell of his passing, no automatic watches clocked his pace. In vain thousands waited and watched. Like the stratospheric globe with Krell and Dredd, the *Lightning Two* had disappeared, and neither it nor its daring occupants were ever seen again.

The world, as had been said, was in a ferment on that 19th day of February, 1973. While scientists labored to increase the power of mankind, and humanitarians worked to increase its

wisdom, blind hatred and greed strove against the spirit of progress and light. When it was 1 p.m. in New Jersey, noon in the middle west, it was night in Europe. Two great armies faced each other on a thousand-mile front. The United Forces of Balko confronted those of the International Nations. Under the stars, 5,000,000 opposing men prepared themselves for what their respective leaders believed to be the final and decisive battle of a war that had already raged for 2 years and extracted its toll of wealth and blood. In trench and dugout, in strongholds and reserve sectors, soldiers of the International Army listened to the voice of their Commanding General addressing them through loudspeakers from General Headquarters.

"Bulwark of Civilization," he cried. "Vanguard of Freedom and Light! This very night, in a few hours at the most, you hurl your valor against the black might of reaction and greed. Remember you are fighting to bring peace and prosperity to a war-weary world, to forever strike from the limbs of yourself and children the shackles of ignorance. War must end! The philosophy that makes of blood and carnage, of suffering and hate, something high and noble, must be rooted out, forever defeated. But in the hour of victory, remember you have come to free your brothers, not to enslave them. Soldiers of the International Army, the ideals and principles of harmony, cooperation, economic well-being must prevail. The eyes of the International World are on you. Down with hate!"

Along the miles of crumbling trenches, applause burst forth like a hoarse muttering of guns, and was answered by a similar roar from opposing trenches, for almost at the same hour and minute, the General commanding United Forces also addressed his men.

"Soldiers! Heroes! —inheritors of the glorious traditions of Alexander, Caesar, and Zelig the Great, the future of our glorious race depends on you. Yonder lies the enemy who would corrupt you and your children with the mawkish sentimentality of internationalism. He would do away with war, with military exploits that make for greatness, for martial courage and the fraternal comradeship of brothers-in-arms. War is the cathartic that purges and cleanses nations; it is the scythe ordained of God that cuts down the weak and the unfit. The strong, the brave, have no need to fear war. He who would do away with war, who would reduce all nations and races to a tame equality, is an enemy of virtue, of courage, of mankind itself. Soldiers! Heroes!

The eyes of history are on you. Down with Internationalism. On to victory!"

The thunderous applause of opposing armies, in answer to the two eloquent speeches, rolled and reverberated along miles of rotting trenches and dugouts. The hour for battle was at hand as masses of men made ready for the ultimate risk and sacrifice demanded of them in the name of peace and international goodwill, in the name of pride and hate. Washington spoke to London and Paris to Moscow. The Capitals of United Forces talked to one another, blond and dark, yellow and white; for such is the inevitable logic of force that arrogant theories of race and creed go down before kindred ambitions and military necessity.

Who should attack? The guns were ready, and the men behind the guns. The bio-bombs were ready and the fighting planes to carry lethal death aloft and scatter it broadcast. Soldiers with machineguns, hand-grenades, bazookas, bullets and neopalm were ready, and yet the opposing armies waited, like hounds straining on a leash.

Gen. Max of United Forces walked impatiently up and down the long staff room, his staff officers respectfully keeping out of his way. His moustaches bristled. On the tables large maps lay unrolled. On the wall, the battlefield was pricked out in relief with colored lights flashing on and off, showing the constant movement and positions of troops and batteries. He paused to study this panoramic map. He hurled orders right and left and orderlies hastened to speak into radio-phones. Suddenly an orderly said, "Sir," and held out a phone. Gen. Max snatched it. "Yes, yes. Max speaking."

The voice of the War Minister of Balko came from the capital 600 miles away. "General—it will reach you within the hour. You understand—the *weapon*—the weapon Virachov has been laboring day and night, for weeks to perfect. Within the hour, yes; do all in your power to avert giving battle until it arrives."

While this conversation was taking place, a spy, picked up in enemy territory by plane and flown to International Military Headquarters, was reporting to Gen. O. Gardner, supreme commanding officer of the International Army. Gen Gardner regarded the spy keenly. "You are sure this is true?"

"My sources have hitherto been reliable, General."

"A new vibratory weapon, you say?"

"That the famous physicist and arms manufacturer, Nebona Virachov, has invented."

"You could get no data as to its construction?"

"None, General; the plans are too well-guarded. My informant was only able to tell of its existence and of its deadliness."

"It will be utilized in the coming battle?"

"That I cannot say. There are rumors to that effect. Its construction is being rushed. Perhaps...."

The general turned to his staff. "Gentlemen, we attack within the hour! It is imperative there be no delay." He turned to a vast relief map, dotted with colored lights, similar to the one on the wall of Gen. Max's headquarters. "Here, and here, pour in the reserves." He barked his orders; staff officers sprang into action; orderlies rushed back and forth. "The enemy must be given no time to bring up the new weapon. Lay down a 45-minute barrage. The aerial squadrons will support..."

Twenty miles back of his front line trenches, Gen. Max lifted his head with a jerk. "What is that?"

"The guns, sir."

"I know it, fool! Get the front line intelligence posts—quick!"

"Front line posts speaking. Enemy heavy guns increasing bombardment; terrific barrage being laid down along the whole front. Attack expected."

Gen. Max looked at his watch. The earth shook. The building shook. The roar of the guns increased. "Orders, sir?"

"Wait, wait."

Out there in the darkness, 20 miles away, men huddled to earth like rabbits, like half-blinded moles, and the shells rained on them and exploded, and the night was hideous with noise, with brimstone fires and smells, and the groans of the wounded and dying.

Forty-five minutes.

"It has arrived, sir."

Gen. Max exulted. "Have it taken forward and put into position at once—at the place prepared—here." He pointed to the map. And then: "Wait! I'll go with it."

The famed Virachov was in charge; the military mechanics worked like mechanical mice. "It doesn't look much," he said, noting the high commander's disparaging look, "but you shall see, General. The ray is generated here, directed through that nozzle over there. As it travels, it spreads. Invisible, yes. Ten miles away, it covers 300 miles of front. Everything it touches vibrates—men, guns, machines. They are shaken to pieces; powder blows up, ammunition dumps. Watch!"

He deflected a lever; vacuum tubes glowed. Like a purring tiger, the grotesque mechanism awoke to life. The range finder made an adjustment and Virachov lit a cigaret. At that moment, the moon peeped over the eastern horizon, flooding the earth with silver light. Minute by minute it climbed heavenward and looked down with indifferent face on the hell of the war below.

At International HQs, Gen. O. Garner pointed to a number and spoke. The barrage lifted and the International soldiers who had advanced slowly under its cover came on in waves.

For what followed, we have the evidence of eyewitnesses: a famous war pilot overhead, two war correspondents privileged to accompany Gen. Max, but who had stood some distance from him and his staff when it happened—several orderlies and an unverifiable number of officers and men in a nearby reserve corps.

Gen. Max, in his interest in the new weapon, in his faith that victory reposed with him (hadn't the War Minister assured him of this?) made the unmilitary mistake of quitting general headquarters without issuing a single order of any vital importance. His staff accompanied him, leaving behind it only those underlings and routine clerks whose habits of military discipline and blind obedience to authority were such as to preclude the showing of any individual initiative. Such was the situation, the condition of affairs when the renowned Virachov, inhaling deeply, thoughtfully twisted a dial. "At your orders, General."

The General gave the order in a low tone as if he realized in that moment the frightfulness of the thing he was doing.

Virachov pressed a button.

An intense flame, bluish in color, hovered over the mouth of the muzzle. Virachov glanced at the illuminated dial of his wrist-watch. "In exactly 30 seconds," he said—but it happened in 15.

The night was cold and clear. The wave of heat was distinctly felt. "As if a warm breath blew from the tropics," one correspondent phrased it. The light of the moon darkened, as if a shadow passed across the moon's face. It could not have been the smoke of the batteries because the wind blew westward and the moon was still climbing in the east. There were no clouds in the sky. Around Gen. Max and his staff, around Virachov and his deadly vibratory machine, the blur descended. All those who witnessed it rubbed their eyes and cried out in amazement. The lone aviator overhead, glancing downward through binoculars, muttered a startled oath. For the shadow obscuring the

light of the moon, the blur enveloping the small group on the ridge, lasted but a second....

Ten miles distant, unaware of the miracle that saved them, of the annihilating vibration arrested in its destructive course, the International soldiers carried the enemy first line trenches, swarmed on to the second, the third. There is no need to tell how the soldiers of the United Forces, after a brief but fierce resistance, demoralized without its higher command and lacking a concerted plan of action, broke and fled. How reaction and hate was forced into a sullen surrender is now a subject for history. It is enough here to note the incredible, the astounding thing which occurred atop that moonlit ridge on the night of Feb. 19, 1973. For when the shadow lifted, the blur disappeared. Gen. Max and his staff, as well as Virachov and his weapon, had disappeared also, had vanished as if into thin air. Witnesses of the uncanny occurrence were left staring at the vacant spot on which, but a moment before, they had stood!

And what had been the cause of it all?—the cause, not alone of these mysterious disappearances but of other unaccountable happenings, such, for instance, as the vanishing of a small library in Potsdam, N.Y. An astounded world asked itself this question and for 25 years it asked in vain. There were those who said Drake and his car had disintegrated from excessive speed, that Gen. Max and his staff had been wiped out when the vib-ray machine backfired.

But this could scarcely be argued of Krell and Dredd in their stratospheric globe.

There was, of course, the theory that the globe had drifted off into space. But giant telescopes had scoured the skies day and night for a sight of it, all in vain. The alternate theory that it had struck a meteor seemed equally unlikely, since there was no evidence of debris. Nor could both the globe and the meteor have vaporized without leaving some trace. The contention that it had somehow broken free from the rod of force and crashed to earth in some remote spot was the most popular—but it did not explain how it could have suddenly vanished from the sight of thousand of telescopes.

Scientists perceived, in the seemingly separate events, phenomena common to all. In each of the three major cases, mention was made of heat waves, of shadows and blurs. (It is only by inference that the Potsdam Library affair is connected up with the three others; in that case the books were reported vanished but not the building.) But beyond coming to the conclusion that

the agency responsible for the mysterious disappearances was the same wherever manifested, no adequate explanation was given by science. Of course, certain superstitious sects and those who substituted religion for reason saw in it all the hand of God. It was flying in the face of Providence (despite the lunar bases and probes to Mars and Venus) to delve too deeply into the secrets of the solar system; it was daring the wrath of Divine Love to travel at such an ungodly speed upon the face of the good earth as 1200 miles per hour; and everyone knew that the people of Balko were heathens. So the hand of God had reached out over the battlefield and the devilish machines—and where were they? Where were the warlords and those who would violate His domain?

So people and institutions sought to answer their own questions, prosaically, superstitiously, and without much success.

Then, 25 years after the mysterious events, Professor Byrne and I discovered the cylinder.

We were in the Rainbow country of Northern Arizona, heading a group of scientists from the Smithsonian Institute, when we first heard of it. An Indian spoke of a huge rock that had fallen from the sky some years before. Immediately we thought of a meteor. But our first glimpse of the colossal mass, half-buried in the earth at the bottom of a wide canyon, brought us to a halt with a gasp of sheer amazement, for no meteor was ever such a peculiar color or so meticulously shaped.

Colossal. I have called it that. But you can have no concept how immense that strange cylinder loomed at first sight and how astounding it was to come upon it in such a deserted place. Though more than half its length was buried in earth, it towered over our heads like a tall building, and its girth was in proportion.

What was it? How had it come to be where we found it? These were but two of the many questions that perplexed us.

"This is not a natural mass of metal," said Dr. Tellegen, the third man of our party. "Look. You can see where it shows signs of having been worked, fashioned."

This was true; the metal was chased in spots and delicately carved.

We all stared at one another.

"In that case," said Henry Quattrocchi, the fourth member of the expedition, "it may not be solid, either."

Not solid! Then what could it contain? With one accord we set to work with drill and hammers. Later we augmented this

with much more powerful equipment parachuted to us from a plane. I shall not weary the readers with a detailed account of how we toiled to pierce the metal shell, of how we blew a section of it out and entered the interior of the cylinder. What we expected to find, I do not know; what we actually discovered...

"My God!" gasped Tellegen, gripping my arm. Our powerful lights lit up the gloomy interior. We had drilled our way into the cylinder just above what seemed a central floor or partition. Some 20 feet back, clustered around a strange machine and supported by metal uprights, was as singular a group as one could imagine. The lights played weirdly on pale set faces and lifeless bodies. These bodies were clothed in an old-fashioned type of military uniform with helmets on their heads.

Then our eyes lifted and travelled beyond this strange tableau to remoter distances and we saw the slim, fluted craft with its silvery gleaming sides on which a name was etched. At the same moment, Prof Byrne—by accident, perhaps, focused his powerful flash-ring overhead and called our attention to what hung suspended there.

We stared, fascinated.

Through glassite walls we saw the two figures with white faces staring out. *Dead faces...*

"What does it mean?" breathed Quattrocchi.

"It means," said Tellegen at length, "the impossible, the incredible. Can't you read that name yonder?"

"*Lightning Two*," I half whispered.

"Yes," said Tellegen, "*Lightning Two*. Drake and his machine! And above there, in their globe, Krell and Dredd. And this group—this group here..."

"Gen. Max and his staff," I stammered.

"Yes," he said, "Gen. Max and his staff. And the Great Virachov."

We stood for a moment, staring at one another incapable of speech; then Quattrocchi gasped: "But how—when—how did they get in here? *Who sealed them in?*"

No one answered. There was no answer to make. Twenty-five years ago those men with their machines had vanished; and here, two and a half decades later, we found them entombed in a strange cylinder in the heart of a wilderness.

Recovering from our first overwhelming astonishment, yes, and more than a little dread, we explored further.

The first half of the cylinder was filled with the objects we have described; in the lower portion we found the plates. Visi-

tors to the Smithsonian Institute II at Kennedy may see one of those plates exhibited, observe the immense letters etched on it; but the gist of the letters engraved on all the plates has never been given to the public. I shall not speculate as to the reasons for this. Suffice it to say that the discovery of the plates is fully authenticated. In addition, there is the indisputable fact that the metal of which they are composed is utterly unknown to earth. The huge cylinder, and the plates found in it, were never fashioned by earthly hands; on that science is agreed; and yet the astounding fact remains that *the printed words on the plates were in English!*

Yes, in English!—though this English was not perfect, and the letters were enormous in size, being etched into the metal with almost painful fidelity and by a process impossible to duplicate; for though the metal plates were flexible to the touch, no tempered steel point, no diamond-cutter, was able to make an impression on them.

It took 1200 of the plates—and each plate was 12 feet long and 3 in width—to contain some 500 words and characters.

The English words formed a brief document of such singular import, and was one so utterly beyond the bounds of credibility in what it implied, that were it not for the mute yet eloquent evidence of metals unknown on earth, of strange methods of etching, of certain unnatural usages and alien structures, science would have dismissed it as a preposterous hoax.

Yet there *was* the evidence of alien metals—and, too, the mysterious, utterly incomprehensible characters heading the document and ending it. Diligent attempts have been made to link these up with the hieroglyphics of ancient Egypt, and the symbols found engraved on the ruins of Mayan temples in Mexico, but without success. Otherworldly they seem, as otherworldly as the unknown metal on which they are etched, adding to the cumulative effect of evidence which exacts a certain measure of belief from the most doubting of scientists.

With this for a foreword, we give the incredible document as copied faithfully from the plates, with only those unavoidable conjectures inserted where meaning could only be guessed at.

★ ★ ★

“JDO—92—98—94. Some strange disaster evidencely hasbe-fallen this planette. Death's nonnoise overhangs it. Everything seemstobe in awonderful state of preservement, yet dead, without life or motion, as if when theunexpected end came its inhabitants hadbeengoing about their livingtasks.

"That these tiny beings—so sizely and structurally reductiond from ourselves—containd acertain measure of intelligence and civilizitude doesnotbedoubted. In one of thehigher layers of thesmall planet's atmospherical envelope, aglobe was excoverd containing primitiv instruments of stelescopes and two (here an incomprehensible word was used but that it meant "man" I am certain and that is the translation given)—men whose bodys, still instinct with action, wereimobilizd by sudden death. We circumd the planet, looking for sines of life and movement but koodfownd none. Twice we were of themoment deceivedly. Believing that motion wasdetected on theplanet's surface, we downd; but some videosyncrasy of this rare atmospher musthavemisled us. We fownd evidencely a vikkle for transportation standing on agroovd track, with countless of thelittle inhabitants (stonifyd in crowds and scatterd groups) away some distance.

"Thecase next was almost alike. Conditions observd indicatd afierce killall mustongoing when themysterious malady overswept thebattlefield. Soldiers wereimmobilestruck at themoments of attack and defense. Agroup of warriors and theoddlooking killmachin which they wereroundclusterd, weretaken aboard, as previous to this were theglobe and thevikkle. These, together several other objects intresting, willbeexamind when leisurd.

"In accord to your instructions, thethought records of theplanet's inhabitants isbeenstudyd. As we havelearned thelanguage of reasonal beings, whatever their form or shape, follows certain basic cosmic matrixes. Thedifficulty to interpretation laynot in thelanguage selfish but in therecorded size of thethought symbols. These were extremely small; in fact, invisibly small; and calld for theusage of thepowermost of dimensionalizers. However, this difficultment becameovercame and thepresent record will be imperishly registerd, inclosd in the (here was another strange symbol which could mean nothing else than the cylinder) and along with thelittle beings and machins pikt up for examinating, returnd to theplanet's surface. It islocated . . . (a string of symbols follows). The present forms of life, except perhaps in bacterial shapes too infinidecimal topermit of examinating, have perisht upon theface of this little world. It now isbecome one total sepulcher.

"Unfortunately, with *our gift of eternal life and perpetual peace and plenitude* (italics mine) we havebecome here too late.

"But that thelife process willagainproduce intelligent beings on this planet, all our wisdom assures us. This reasonly, we leave behind this record of our visit. In 50,000,000 (?) we shall

re-be here. In the between, we shall go on to the remaining planets of this small solar system where, hopefully, reasoning life may be found—all lively."

☆ ☆ ☆

Reasoning beings... alive! So ended the incredible message; and it can be imagined with what utter amazement we first read it, with what mixed emotions of incredulity and belief the world of science first learned of its existence. But as I have said, there was the evidence of metals unknown to earth to convince the doubting, and the completeness with which it accounted for the mysterious disappearances of February 19, 1973.

Yet for all that, there was something which lacked explanation, and I called it to the attention of Prof. Byrne and to Dr. Gallet of the Paris Institute. "Granted," I said, "that something mysterious visited earth and sealed the globe, the car, with their occupants, and Gen. Max and his staff, into the cylinder, how was it that no eye on earth perceived such visitors? Could they have been *invisible* men?"

"And how was it such visitors could view a speeding car, a battle in progress, the excited movements of Krell and Dredd, and thousands of people, on that day which, because of the many speed and distance records simultaneously shattered we remember as Earth's Lucky Day;—how could they observe such uncommon activity and yet report it as if they believed life to be *extinct* on earth?! As if they had witnessed no movement, no action, heard no sound?"

It was Dr. Gallet who answered me at length. "It is all a profound mystery," he agreed, "and yet—aren't you mistaken in thinking no eye perceived them? Wasn't the blur, the shadow, the heat—*them*? All of them that man could see or feel."

He continued: "You have noted that the alien document implies the visitors to have been of colossal size. They evidently came from outside our solar system, from a world immensely greater than our own—both physically and scientifically—where conditions of time, even of organic structure, seemingly differ radically from Earth's patterns. If we postulate beings whose day is our second or minute, whose physical structure is in accord with such conditions, then we imagine beings unable to hear us, to hear the sounds of earth, or to perceive our motions. To them we might well appear motionless, silent, stricken with death."

We looked at one another mutely, a sense of wonder stirring once again in corridors of the brain long disused because of a

surfeit of man-made miracles stuffing them from the past decades.

"And Krell," I said, "and Dredd, and all the other poor devils, unable to make their plight known; dying, with eternal life around them!"

"Oh, I know," said Gallet, "that this explanation may not be entirely satisfactory, that it may have certain flaws; but the physical observations, the intellectual reactions of actual Brobdingnagians, beings vast beyond comprehension and existing at a time-rhythm immensely swifter than our own, would be so indescribably different from what we know that it is absurd to advance this objection or that. I can only say that my theory best fits the facts."

It did. It does. And so the world of 21st century science has decided.

And 21st century man? Our planet plundered and polluted, overcopulated (they didn't listen to Jose Farmer) and undernourished; psychotic, chaotic and wildly out of control; we rue the day—Earth's "Lucky" Day—that we missed our opportunity for the Millenium, the day we prided ourselves, with our limited understanding, that we had accomplished much, when in our ignorance we did not realize we had lost everything!

Everything: a brave new word—Humanhood. A dream of the ages realized: perpetual peace. Plenamins for body and mind. *Lebensraum* and *liebenstraum*. All could have been ours, a gift from the stars, from a supernal civilization Out There., from a planet of sanity...somewhere in the sevagram.

And our next chance at bestowed humanhood will be in—what? 50,000,000...years? Our time—or theirs?

Not that it will matter, anyway. On Earth's *next* "lucky day," no matter how great the activity on our slow motion planet, we'll appear just as dead and frozen as last time to our giant would-be benefactors.

Just as dead.

If, in paralyzing point of fact, we aren't *indeed*, O God-Samaritans by then a grave nude world, a cemetery planet.

* * * * *

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ALIEN CARNIVAL

By WALT LIEBSCHER

Bess Border looked out the window. It was spring and it was festival day. Children were running down the street, breathlessly excited, wrapped in radiant finery and the magic of the season. The very atmosphere seemed to tingle with excitement. But, somehow she just didn't seem to care.

Half-heartedly she tied the bow on her costume and wished it were just another day. Everyone else seemed so gay and full of spirits, while she felt dull and lifeless. She looked at her husband, resplendent in a dashing cavalier outfit with a crimson cape. He definitely wasn't the type.

"Pa," she said, "you'd better call the kids."

"Come children, we mustn't be late," said George Border. "I nearly missed the takeoff last year and I've never quite forgiven myself."

"We're coming, Father," said the children, and soon they were clustered around him like a bunch of expectant puppies.

Many of their gayly costumed neighbors were already headed towards the launching grounds as the Border menage burst out of their front door in a riot of color.

Bess spied Mamie Bratcher, hurrying along in a strikingly opulent costume.

"Hi, Bess," said Mamie. "You'd better hurry. Don't want to be late this year, 'specially since your boy Army is takin' off in the festival ship."

"Should say not," she said, trying to sound earnest, then slipped into a reverie. Army, my boy. I wonder if all the other mothers in those other years felt this way? Did they all believe the Festival Day, the Feast of the Takeoff, a wasteful thing, almost pagan in its ritual? Besides, there was no reason for it

any more. She tried to remember the customs of Earth, her real home.

Bess was shocked out of her reverie as a small bundle of color dashed by her and sidled up to her boy, Bob.

"Hi, Tim."

"Hi, Bob, wanta see my new rocket model, just like the festival model? Even has people in it, and look, aren't they real just like life? And even some like when after a rocket crashes, with blood and everything."

She listened incredulously, and a chill ran up her spine.

"Shame on you, Tim Taylor," said Bob Border. "You know we ain't supposed to say anything about rockets crashing. It's against the rule and it spoils the fun."

"Aaaah, all right, the rocket won't crash, but I'll bet you my model against your pocket knife something will happen maybe."

Fun, she thought. Maybe something will happen! Did they really enjoy it? And why all the pretense. Why didn't they just light the fires and—oh, it was all so hopeless.

The kids were still chattering away in their own youthful pattern.

"Think I'm crazy? My model is worth many more than your old pocket knife, even if it did come off a festival pilot."

For the first time Bess Border noticed the crowd. Hordes of people were streaming in multi-colored droves towards the hub of the city, the huge, circular launching grounds. Bells jingled, whistles blew, funny little festival face balloons were everywhere. With high hilarity and gentle shoving, they were all converging around the rocket.

When the family finally caught sight of the rocket needling its way into the horizon, she noticed the festival air diminish and give way to a sense of awe and wonderment. The rocket was a symbol, the very reason for the celebration, the crux of the holiday madness that held the people in its spell for ages.

"Mom," said Bob, "I can't see a thing. I wanta see the rocket."

"Pa, lift him up so as he can see," she said, and in spite of herself, she was standing on tiptoe to see everything.

"Gee, this is fine," said Bob as his father lifted him up and sat him on his shoulder. "Do you think we'll get to see Army, ha, will we? Will we Ma?"

"Probably will son, probably for the last time." She looked toward her husband. "Oh, Pa, it all seems so useless, picking all the best young men and training them for these holiday launchings. And for what?"

"Now Ma, quiet down. Suppose someone hears you. You know it's the custom." He tendered her a look of understanding.

"But it's different this year, Pa, what with Army being on the ship. Our own flesh and blood. Makes one wonder."

"For God's sake hush, you're talking too loud."

"But Pa, it isn't fair. We weren't born here. Maybe years ago when things were scarce and people were fighting for mere existence, there might have been some excuse for the Ritual. Besides, I still hold to Earth customs and all this just doesn't seem right."

"Bess, this is no time to discuss it. You know we swore allegiance to Alpha and its customs. Even as young as we were, we had to sign the documents. Now, I'll hear no more of this. Be quiet and watch the ceremonies."

A group of dignitaries began to ascend the speakers platform, followed by a stately file of uniformed young men.

"Look, Ma, there's Army. There's Army now."

"I see, I see," she said, struggling vainly to hold back the tears that swelled in her eyes.

"Shush, now, listen to the speaker," said Pa.

"Ladies and gentlemen. You all know why we are gathered here today. It is gratifying to see so many gayly colored costumes and to see the spirit of my countrymen. For this is a Holiday, and in spite of many rumors to the contrary, I'm sure we shall continue the launchings for many, many years."

The crowd cheered.

"And these intelligent and upstanding young men," the speaker continued, "and many more like them will continue thru the years to keep our faith and to probe the mysteries of the great unknown, to sacrifice their very lives, if necessary, for us, ladies and gentlemen, for us. Cheers for our intrepid pilots, our crew, our spacemen."

Bess listened as the crowd cheered. She watched as the people waved frantically, then a hushed expectancy seemed to build up within them.

"And furthermore," began the speaker.

"Launch the ship," yelled someone.

"No more speeches, no more speeches, launch the ship," yelled the crowd.

Patiently, with tear dimmed eyes, she waited for the muffled roar to build up within the bowels of the rocket. She felt a summer hotness build up around her. Suddenly there was a blinding flash, a rush of wind, and the rocket was gone.

There goes my son. There he goes forever. She remembered launchings of other years. With each increasing year the speeches shortened, the crowd grew more expectant, more impatient. The young ones grew more exhilarated, more inhuman, more unlike earthman.

Bess looked at her husband. "Pa, do we have to wait for the news? We all know what it will be. I'd just as soon not hear it. Let them hear it. I don't feel akin to them anymore." Her gaze shifted to the crowd and she shivered nervously.

"Ma, you know we have to wait for the news. Seems to me you're acting rather queer lately. Better see the doctor soon."

"What ails me doesn't require a doctor, Pa. I'm just sick at heart and lonesome for Earth."

"Lonesome for Earth! What nonsense." He stared at her strangely.

She started to say something but was interrupted by the blare of a loud speaker.

"Ladies and gentlemen," it said, "I have the news."

The crowd hushed itself into a startling silence.

"There has been an accident." The speaker was silent for a moment as if to allow an unbearable tension to build up within the people. "The rocket has crashed near milepost eleven on highway 73, just one mile south of Crandsburg."

"Light the fires! Light the fires," yelled the crowd. "Let the festival start. To your cars. On to the crash." They worked themselves into a frenzy of shouting. A mass of maniacal faces melted towards waiting autocars.

"Go," said the speaker.

"Go," answered the crowd.

Almost miraculously the square emptied and gayly bedecked automobiles started towards the highway in a steady stream, at ever increasing speeds. Children laughed innocently and their parents laughed with them, though not quite in the same way. There was an air of eagerness in them, the spell of the holiday, the harbinger of feasting.

Like animals they converged on the wreck and waited.

Bess Border sat in the car with ears half dead and eyes unseeing. The children were fidgeting restlessly and her husband, who was fast becoming a stranger to her, drove like a demon.

When they reached the wreck the crowd pushed back to let them through, for it was the privilege of those whose sons were pilots to search the wreckage first.

They found him slumped over an instrument panel. With

trembling hands she stroked his hair, then, with infinite tenderness, she pressed her fingers on his eyelids and closed them forever.

"Army," she sobbed, "Oh, God, why?"

They carried him out through the envious crowd. "Aren't they lucky," said a voice. "He's all in one piece."

And when all the privileged families had removed their sons, the crowd rushed in and fought for what was left.

Later the Border family were gathered on the porch. The night was balmy and clear. Bess studied her husband, who sat contentedly smoking his pipe. The kids were busy counting stars.

Her gaze shifted to her younger son and she tried to smile. "Bob, it's your bedtime, better go inside."

The boy ran to her for his usual goodnight kiss.

"Gosh, Mom," he said innocently, "you sure are a good cook."

She started to say something, her throat tightening. Then, suddenly, she turned and ran screaming into the night.

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A
LETTER
FROM
MR. SCI-FI



SPACEWAY'S feature columnist, *Forrest J Ackerman*, will be sending a letter winging this way, about the time you read this department, from—Rio de Janeiro! Invited to participate in the week-long science fiction film & literature portion of the 2d International Film Festival, Brazil, he will do so in the company of such s.f. greats as A. E. van Vogt, Theodore Sturgeon, Philip Jose Farmer . . . The total list is not known as we go to press but it is understood that Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov, John Wyndham, Brian Aldiss, Frederik Pohl, Sam Moskowitz, Eric Frank Russell and Richard Matheson have also been invited.. It should be a stellar event and you'll read a first hand account of it here next issue. —Editor.

Dear Reader

The rare award of the Emerald Eagle Eye goes, this issue, to rotten reader Oswald Train who had the temerity to point out I made an error last issue! (For this he is sentenced to 17 years hard labor: reading the collected works of Clinton Constantinescu . . . in the Braille edition.) The Trained eye of Oswald picked up the following: " 'The Man Who Was Two Men' was not written by Farley but Ray Cummings. By the way, when did Farley die?"

Dear Mr Train: Farley's demise was obitted in Science Fiction Times 4 or 5 years ago. The best way to keep up with deaths in the s.f. world (also births, marriages, divorces, honors, awards, conventions, book reviews, magazine news, etc.) is to subscribe to SFTimes. Sample copy 30 cents from SFT at Box 216, Syracuse/NY 13209; \$3 per year, checks to Frank R. Prieto Jr. Issue No. 463 has a lengthy tribute to Boris Karloff, who ap-

peared in a known total of 150 films from 1919 thru 1969. Before he died he knew he was to receive an award from the Count Dracula Society, and he lived to give his blessing to the establishment in London of a Boris Karloff Theater, to offer an exclusive fare of "Karloffilms" and the kind of pictures associated with his name.

As for the "Man Who Was Two Men" booboo, Mr Train, you are entirely right: it was "The Man Who Met Himself" I had in mind.

Wendayne Ackerman recently accompanied me to a preview of Ray Bradbury's THE ILLUSTRATED MAN. In the audience I noted Stan Freberg; Wm Nolan, Bradbury's biographer; Dennis Etchison, who is adapting Bradbury's "The Fox and the Forest" as a film to be known as TIMERUN; and Ray Harryhausen, world's No. 1 builder & animator of movie monsters of the King Kong genre. Film is a trilogy based on "The Veldt" (aka "The World the Children Made"), "The Long Rain" ("Death by Rain") and "The Last Night of the World." Wendayne was ecstatic, to put it mildly. "I read the stories and it was fantastic the way they were developed," she enthused. "I really felt I was on Venus, undergoing that pelting rain; and the architecture in 'The Veldt'—fabulous!—it really projected me into the future. I was so engrossed in the ending that it had me on the seat of my edge."

Stan Freberg, the master of masterful TV commercials, has created one with Ray Bradbury Himself in Person! Soon you'll tune in to Freberg speaking, sometime in the 21st Century, of the amazing historical accuracy of the predictions of Ray Bradbury, how he prophesied the rocket to the moon, the conquest of space, the fate of the pedestrian, the automated man, etc. As Freberg goes on the watchful eye of Bradbury is upon him via a kingsize wall videoseen. Finally Freberg goes too far: "And it was Bradbury who predicted the wrinkle-less raisin—" (or whatever the product is) whereat Bradbury is seen raisin' an eyebrow and speaking from the screen: "Now hold on a minute, there—" If This Goes On we may expect Arthur C. Clarke advertising Clarke's Tours, Heinlein on TV for Freeways Unlimited ("The Roads Must Roll!") and Robert Bloch—? Fonda motorpsychos!

Any reader who wd care to meet me in person and lives in the New York area will find me April 11-13 at the Hotel McAlpin, attending the 3-day sci-fi conference known as the LUNACON. If you've never attended an s.f. convention you owe it

to yourself. Advance membership is a meagre \$2; 50c more if you wait to pay at the door. Get advance publications concerning the convention by sending your money to Franklin M. Dietz, 655 Orchard St, Oradell/NJ 07649.

Filmonster fans wishing to meet me should contact Mark Frank for info about time & place. I expect to participate in a "monstercon" on Sat or Sun, 5-6 Apr in Brooklyn. Check with Mark at 801 Ave C, Brooklyn/NY 11218. And when you write, you might include 60c for the great new issue of his *Photon*, the Karloff Memorial issue.

Xenon, 48-page foto-illustrated fanzine, in its current issue features "The Mighty Ackermmonster, Part 1." If you think one part of Ackerman wd be all you cd stand, send 50c; if you *must* know ALL, \$1 will bring you Part 2 as well. From Box 892, North Miami, Fla 33161.

All flippancy aside, I do hope to take some pride in a pocket-book scheduled to go on sale in April and if you can't find it on a newsstand for 95c you can order it direct from the publisher for an additional 25c. The title (not my own) is THE SCIENCE FICTION WORLDS OF FORREST J ACKERMAN AND HIS FRIENDS. The friends include AE van Vogt, Theo. Sturgeon, Robt. A. W. Lowndes and several others with whom I have collaborated, plus "guest appearances" of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Olaf Stapledon, Lon Chaney, Bela Lugosi... 25 stories & articles selected from about 30 years of writing and including what I consider some of my best works: "When Frighthood Was in Flower," 8800 words of serious treatment of the fantasy film field; "Letter to An Angel," a story; "The House in the Twilight Zone," an article; and "The Radcliffe Effect," too dangerous a vision for publication in 1947. Illustrations by Hannes Bok, Neil Austin and others. From Powell Publications, 18554 Sherman Way, Reseda, Calif 91335.

By the by, Powell is the first American publisher to use "sci-fi" as an identification for their monthly science fiction line. First 2 titles, Chas. Nuetzel's original Burresque (in the style of Edgar Rice Burroughs) novel of magic adventure 30,000 BC, "Swordmen of Vistar," and AE van Vogt & E. Mayne Hull's fantasyarns, "Out of the Unknown"; Nuetzel's "Images of Tomorrow" due in March; future titles to include "Conquest of Mars" by Garrett P. Serviss, a new super-hero series by Nuetzel, "Son of Sci-Fi Worlds" by self, E. Everett Evans' "Alien Minds," Ray Cummings' "Girl in the Golden Atom," etc.

AGAIN, DANGEROUS VISIONS is the title of Harlan Elli-

son's forthcoming companion to his original milestone anthology. He has purchased AE van Vogt's "Future Value" for it.

MORE THAN HUMAN is being scripted by its author, Theo. Sturgeon, for filming.

GEO. PAL, Karl Freund (cameraman & director, of METROPOLIS, DRACULA and Karloffilm THE MUMMY fame), Fritz Leiber, Robt. Bloch, many other celebs, will participate in the 7th Annual Ann Radcliffe Awards Banquet, Hollywood, evening of Sat 19 Apr. Interested parties should contact Dr. Donald Reed, 334 W 54 St, Los Angeles, Calif 90037.

S. F. ANTHOLOGIES in the works: *A Wilderness of Stars*, Wm Nolan; *Here There Be Dinosaurs*, myself; *S.F. Authors' Favorites No. 2*, Harry Harrison; *Sea of Space*, Nolan; ZENITH: *The Ultimate Science Fiction Anthology*, self; an untitled collection of original work by bright new talents, David Gerrold; and a new book from Moskowitz that will have quite a bit about Burroughs in it. Authors! Anthologists! Advertisements for Yourself freely available: just let me know what you're doing that you wd like publicized.

A MOON-SHOT one-shot (amateur publication) was offered by Beryl Mercer of England on 27 Dec 68 "as a token of gratitude to the People of the United Sates of America." In a 3-page tribute to the crew of Apollo 8 she said in part, "Thank you for giving me the most thrilling, suspenseful, frustrating Christmas I have ever known in my life—and this was my 44th." Concluding: "The names, the names . . . Gagarin, Popov, Valentina Ter—what *was* her name? Glenn, Schirra . . . so many that I've now forgotten. I shouldn't forget. I'm here, at the beginning of the Space Age, seeing it, hearing about it, reading of it—I should remember them all! I will look up the names of *all* the astronauts, the cosmonauts, and commit to memory them and their immortal dates with destiny." Beryl's address is 10 Lower Church Lane, St. Michael's, Bristol BS2 8BA, England.

On the occasion of my 50th birthday in 1966, 200 friends surprised me with a banquet and pleased me with an 82-page publication with contributions by Ray Bradbury, August Derleth, Isaac Asimov, Rick Sneary, Walter Ernsting, Edmond Hamilton & Leigh Brackett, Kris Neville, Brian Aldiss, Terri Pinckard, Bjo Trimble—so many many good friends. I don't relate this for purposes of egoboo but because a story appeared in it, "The Gentle People," and it was copyrighted by the L.A. Science Fantasy Society, and a couple of years later when, as James Causey's agent, I caused the story to be published in the last issue of

SPACEWAY, I had forgotten about its having been *copyrighted* for the limited fan-edition. The copyright holders have generously agreed to drop their \$1 million lawsuit for an out-of-court settlement of one million weetongs and public acknowledgement of prior publication. PS: I hope you enjoyed the story.

The Story Behind the story of "Earth's Lucky Day." One of the earliest s.f. stories I remember reading—when we still called it "scientifiction" was "The Machine Man of Ardathia" by Francis Flagg, *Amazing Stories*, November, 1927. It is regarded as a classic, at least by the likes of Donald Wollheim, Sam Moskowitz, Bill Crawford, Bob Madle and oldwave duddyfuddies like myself. "Little did I dream" that 9 years later my name wd appear with Francis Flagg as a *collaborator*! But by '34 my friend Flagg admitted to me he was running out of ideas. I was full of them but had no professional ability as a writer yet, so we hit on the happy combination of ideas/Ackerman, fictionizing/Flagg. "Earth's Lucky Day," Apr '36 *Wonder Stories*, was the first commercial success and at 19 I was as thrilled as say you wd be today, if you're a would-be young writer, to find your name bylined with Heinlein. They liked the plot well enough in Switzerland, some years later, to dramatize it over the radio as "A Question of Time." But nearly 25 years after it was written, I reread it for reprinting. *I was appalled!* It disintegrated before my eyes. It's dreadful to have to criticize a dead idol but suddenly I realized I was older now than Flagg had been and the whole body of his work consisted of about 20 stories. With reluctant necessity I found myself editing Francis Flagg. Had I had time I might have discarded the collaboration entirely and, utilizing the idea which was mine in the first place, completely re-written it. But from 10 at night till 4 A.M., when you've been working from 10 the previous morning, is no time to write a 5700-word story against a deadline—revising it with blood-shot eyes was bad enough. I hope I improved it; I'd be interested in the opinions of any of you who have read both versions. In fact I'd be interested to hear from any of you—period. I live in a little Box numbered 35252 at Preuss Station, Los Angeles, Calif 90035. See you next issue!

Yours Siencerely,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in dark ink, likely reading "Francis Flagg". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends across the width of the signature.

GOING HOME

By KRIS NEVILLE

ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN GAUGHAN

As The jets roared...and Joe Wolfe came back from memory to find that he was plunging toward the sun in that last fatal orbit of the Down.

There were years that over-reached themselves: a compacted infinity of endless stretches of space memory. For no man can stand before a port, peering out into the jet and awful loneliness of space where diamond hard spits of fire blaze unceasingly, without feeling the continuity of the past and the future, of the now and eternity. All things, all ages, all, meet for a moment. A thousand thousand threads converging into the knot of the present; a thousand thousand threads radiating outward into the tomorrow.

He thought: Space makes all men immortal in the moment. Everything is caught and mirrored in brief self.

The jets roared.

Behind was Lunar, covered by the mantle of sparks his ship let fall. A bright-hard diadem set in velvet emptiness. Ahead of him, around him, within him, eternity.

"You are old," they had told him. And he had waved his huge knuckled hands, shot through by time, like a wounded bird in flight: frantic and aimless. And retired.

Then he had sat in the swivel seat behind the shiny desk and watched the fleet of silver birds leap skyward in a mist of fire, singing the song of the jets, going upward, and the song dying into silence.

He had looked out of the windows of Administration and seen the ant hill movement concentrated on pouring a stream of cargo outward. He had counted them away, like an old sea captain the

John B. Gaughan



passing ships; he had counted them back in again, seen them scarred and dented, and known the ones who never returned. The shuttle of activity in which he was an observer, processing unreal paper slips that bore no relation to the great play of passions unfolding beyond the walls.

The jets roared.

He thought: And I am alone with her again. With space, the dark lady of the soul sonnets: the unknowable love. . . .

There is a lethal attraction in space: like the haunting thought of death. Fear intermingled with an indefinable ecstasy: peering down from the orbital esplanade into the infinite. Spacemen love space for what she is, and fear her for what she does: for sending prowling fingers of alien thought that knead the fertile soil of mind, planting strange seeds, and, in the ripeness of time, cultivating exotic blossoms.

That is why one man is never left alone in the control room. That is why the pilots divide their time between the scanner and their fellow pilot. Men intent upon the business of navigation, and also alert for the first glassy-eyed sign of space fever in the man next to them.

A wave of insanity can flutter across a nation: a man jumps from a building, and dozens imitate him. Suicides employing identical means: the tenuous power of suggestion.

In space it is not called suicide: it is called space fever. And there is a pattern.

"When you come to love space, leave her." That is the classic precept. Because only those who love space can know the fever. But the profound gentlemen who search in the innermost recesses of the mind have never explained how you can leave the thing you love. Or if the aching loneliness in separation is better than the final embrace.

The jets roared.

For three years he had waited in mechanical inactivity, while space called plaintively, like the sea to the retired and rhuemy-eyed Captains of yesteryear. Then Tri-Planet developed the single ship, whose cargo had a margin of profit greater than the ship itself. One trip was enough: and they could afford to lose a ship now and then.

They needed experienced spacemen. And experienced spacemen will work a single ship only when they can find no other job. The

Tri-Planet dealt in human lives; but there was a cloak of legality: for each man is free to pursue his own profession. Each man works his own way through the web of life, and each man weaves his own destiny.

And an old, retired spaceman can ignore the psychiatrists when they say: "If you keep going back, it will eventually get you." For they do not give you a time limit: how many safe trips are still left within your clay form: how much flight living remains?

He had seen the stars on a clear winter night: from Earth, calling to him through the heavy atmosphere, twinkling to him like a million mistress' coy eyes. And his own eyes had misted, watching, with memory, with the vague, indefinable longing. . . .

He had said: "One more trip. One last trip. . . . Once more." But three times, on the single ship, alone with his destiny, the moon had faded behind him, and Mars had spread like a map unrolling, before him.

The jets roared.

There was an inner excitement; and a restful quiet: interconnected in a way beyond all description, which only the old spacemen can know.

"I'll quit next trip," he told himself, speaking aloud, apologizing to her out there, and knowing that he lied. For, unable to prevent it, he would keep coming back.

Love is stronger than fear.

And he knew that space—how was the line?—"never did betray the heart that loved her." He laughed, not wildly, but deeply, for he had nothing to fear.

The jets roared.

He adjusted the controls with his long experienced hands and relaxed. The long practiced art of spacemen. Letting his thoughts eddy like drifting smoke.

Memory is easy. But the time relationship is painful. Memory without time.

"You're a spaceman now, Joe," she had said.

He had seized her around the waist, twirling her around until her careful hair-fluttered loose in a golden rain. He had set her down, both laughing.

Laughing eyes: for her eyes glittered and laughed like the farthest

stars. Laughing hair: for it shone like the spring-time sun, overbrimming with secret glee. And the darkness and light played on her yet young face.

"Your uniform is beautiful," she had said, fingering the shining lapel insignia. She had looked up at him with eyes turned serious. "We can be married now," she had whispered.

That was when he had been graduated from the Academy: how long ago?

But better not to think of time, for out here it is not. But Earth-bound, time has no meaning until suddenly you're old, and you fear to think of it, lest you come to treasure the last minute-drops of life that fall swiftly, oh, so swiftly, into the placid lake of the past. You look ahead where there was once a river, and now you see only a tiny stream: you look behind to see where it has all gone, finding it there, clear, deep and cool, and forever untouchable. But here it has no meaning. Here is a timeless dream of what was and what might have been.

But dreams aside, there had been his dull-death Earth life of three years, where he had remembered the unnumbered years flowing past. He could not dam them with his body, nor speed nor retard the flow. He was unsubstantial before them, filtering out only memories that lodge in the fine screen work of his mind.

He could afford to remember once more, as it was, before he began to build the new yesterday.

He thought: You don't see your wife often, a spaceman.

He forced himself to face it, for the last time. And the memory of pain was sweet, for it would soon be gone.

Eventually, laughing eyes, no longer childlike, had left him.

She had herded in the children: gathering them from him. Remarried.

"They need a father," she had said. "And I need a husband, not a fleeting shadow and a memory."

He had known it would happen. And it hurt, as he knew it would. He had tried to shrug it off: "I can't stand it any longer, Joe."

But a spaceman needs to come home to love. Otherwise there is only the cosmic loneliness that separates the visitor from the new world. And gradually he had come to look more to Her, out there, than to fellow men and women.

He had met and passed shadow figures in the dread night of humanity: "Buy me a drink, huh, big boy," and later, "I'll be waiting

for you, honey, when you come back." The unsubstantial substance of spaceport women. Where there is no love, but only hollowness.

No one loves a spaceman.

People forget: Emotions sputter out in the vacuum of time.

He thought: I saw Laughing Eyes ten times in twelve years.

And now, in this temporal moment, it was no consolation that she had lasted longer than most.

The last time: there had been the barrier of worlds between them. Neither were what they once were: strangers only. They could no longer go back to the bright day at the Academy. The insignia was tarnished, now.

"I'm—I'm sorry, Joe."

"I know, Laughing Eyes," he had said, putting his head in his hands; and his Earth tears of the moment had been borne along by time to mingle in that glorious pool from which no mortal, however thirsty, may ever drink.

The past.

And strange, too, how first he had feared space: not understanding. Remembering the first trip with fatherly emotion. How easy to recreate, for spacemen live with memory, peer out into the void where time unfolds, reeling back.

Time to remember again, before the past is forgotten.

The jets roared.

Memory came clear. . . .

Out of the mists, and he was smiling wryly. Long ago.

His stomach began to surge; his heart expanded and blood pounded in his ears like the break of waves on the beach.

He lay back on his bunk. Things had that swimming green. . . . "Yah feeling ok, kid?" came the voice from the sickness around him.

"Sure," he gulped. "Sure. Just—fine." And sickness was clawing its way up from his stomach, rising. He shut his mouth. Tight.

The Second stretched out full length, smoking a cigarette, enjoying the bottomless feeling of accelerating movement.

"I know how you feel: if they don't stop the ship you think you'll die. Things rising to a climax in you."

"I—" he gasped, "all right."

"You'll live: they always do. Coupla days an' you're over it."

The Second sucked in the smoke.

"Take me:" he said, brooding, "Hell, free flight is second nature

to me. Couldn't live without it. . . . And don't go getting any ideas, either: it's not the Fever. Not ol' McMinn, Wolfe, my boy; that's for loonies."

Joe Wolfe tried to steer his mind: "What'cha suppose causes it?"

"The Fever?" The Second squirmed on the bed, getting comfortable. "Don't know: guess nobody does." He stared at the overhead. "Don't even like to think much about it. You wouldn't either, if you ever saw one of the poor devils, afterwards."

Joe Wolfe muttered something.

"I'll tell you," the Second continued. "'Gotta go back,' they keep sayin', over and over: 'Gotta go back.' They somehow think they've left something out here. Mindless, pathetic."

He blew a lazy smoke ring.

"They seem convinced that they have to die out here: horrible."

He shuddered, peering sightlessly upward, lost in grim thought.

Joe Wolfe unhearing, struggled, trying to master the sickness. He closed his eyes and time passed. He could not measure it, minutes or hours. All encompassed by spacesickness.

The Second slept and there was silence. Broken, finally by the harsh roar of the jets, long since silenced, now that the orbit was set.

Almost immediately the alarm bell chattered harshly and the Second's feet hit the deck in automatic response.

"Helmet," he cried. "Get your helmet. We must be trying to blast clear of a meteorite storm."

He was already struggling into his awkward suit.

"I'm—I'm sick," Joe Wolfe answered.

"You ain't got time," the Second roared. "Get that helmet on." And the Second was out of the cabin.

Joe Wolfe pulled on his space suit, stomach quivering. He buckled down the helmet and heard an unreal conversation chatter ringingly in the steel confines.

He weaved toward the bridge.

There, before the control room, stood a jam of officers, all talking into their open mikes at once, all bulky in their tin union suits.

A charged voice crackled: "Quiet!" And then, "Helmets off." Unmistakably the voice of the Skipper.

Joe Wolfe unbuckled his helmet with a flood of relief: no leak, then. He flipped it back over his head, where it bobbed wildly between his shoulder blades.

"Wrecking bar!" the Skipper barked.

He felt himself helping to unlimber it from the wall rack.

Then, with other officers, he was slammimg it against the sealed control room door. The door buckled. It screamed piercingly, and then, with a final plunge of the wrecking bar, crashed inward.

There was a single, shocked moment while everyone waited.

The Skipper broke into smooth motion, hurling himself into the room.

He grabbed the assistant third by the shoulder and spun him around. The man was old, and the Skipper hurled a right hook into his face; it sent him, like a spinning feather, across the room. One of the officers caught him.

The Skipper had to step over the other half of the watch, who was lying before the central control board. His head had been cut open with a wrench; it leaked blood onto the floor panneling.

The Skipper's hands moved in practiced rhythm.

"We're not far on the outward swing," he said tensely. He cut the power by jamming the firing lever back savagely.

Silent and white-faced the officers watched.

How far along the dread orbit?

The Skipper's eyes flew from dial to dial.

"Go to the crew: form them at escape hatches," he said calmly.

There was silence for a moment as the Chief moved to comply.

"'Gator," the Skipper snapped. The astrogator stepped forward. The Skipper reeled off a series of figures on the recorder, reading them from the dials.

The 'Gator ripped the paper from the machine and sat down at his desk. He fed the numbers into the calculator.

Joe Wolfe stood motionless, sickness forgotten.

"Twenty-seven on one," the 'Gator barked.

"Twenty-seven on one," the Skipper echoed.

"Power two-oh-three."

"Power two-oh-three," said the Skipper, adjusting the firing lever.

A whirl of tape was issuing from the calculator with calibrated sections overlaid by the flight line.

"Now!" the 'Gator snapped.

The Skipper threw the lever and the ship shuddered.

The calculator clacked and hummed.

Without taking his eyes off the tape, the Gator asked: "Fuel?"

Joe Wolfe's eyes strayed to the indicator: it wavered on the red.

"Nine-point-seven," the Skipper hissed.

The 'Gator fed this information into his machine.

"Partial deflection," he said. "We can check her to escape and head outward."

The Skipper looked up. The fuel indicator was in the red. "Check," he said tiredly. He turned. "Sound the alarm. You"—he pointed to Joe Wolfe, "see this man out." He referred to the man on the floor.

They crowded into the escape ship. Everyone was tense. The Skipper cut the ship free, but it continued, by the grim hand of inertia, to cling to the mother ship.

Velocity was well below escape. The Skipper nursed the blast, conserving fuel. The tiny craft pulled free.

They had checked the mother ship before the acceleration had become too great to permit escape with their limited fuel, and they were free.

The Skipper nursed the little craft into the Mars orbit.

He glanced at the fuel gauge. Plenty. And they had avoided the horrible, and easily set orbit of the Down: the final plunge men with the Fever try to make.

The Second peered out the port, musing. "It would have been a hell of a way to die," he said, shuddering. "Roasted. Your skin turning red, and metal getting too hot to touch. . . . God!"

Joe Wolfe came back from memory. His jets had sputtered and died. The powerful roar, coughing like an old man, deeply, and silence. The silence of space. Of Her, out there.

He glanced languidly at the fuel dial. Posted across the red. Empty.

He did not need to tell himself to relax. For his mind was caught up with the strange dreams of space, the flimsy web of Eternity.

Only his body, dull and empty, was roaring now toward the sun in the orbit of the Down, toward the maw of the hungry sun, like a moth into a flame.

And his ego, that indefinable essence of man, unweighed, unmeasured, and unknown, was—almost—floating free. Was waiting eagerly for its last contact with reality, to be consumed by purifying flame.

And he would be finally and irrevocably lost, not in the inexpressible loneliness, but in the quiet womb of the first mother.

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Myles Cabot battles the Martian invaders of his adopted planet

THE RADIO MINDS OF MARS

by Ralph Milne Farley

IN THREE PARTS—PART TWO

SYNOPSIS OF PART ONE

Myles Cabot has been transported to the planet Venus via a matter-transmitter. There he meets Princess Lilla of Cupia. (The Cupians are human, but instead of ears, they communicate by means of antennae which grow from their foreheads. They also possess vestigial wings.) Myles and Lilla are mated and their son Kew becomes King of Cupia.

The Cabots' Venusian castle is attacked by the spaceships of invading octopus-like beings from Mars, who can both read and send thoughts.

Lilla escapes, but Myles and Kew are captured by the Martians. They are taken to the city of Yat which is inhabited by Whoomangs—an assorted collection of creatures who have been given human intelligence by the insertion into their brains of a weird grub-like worm known as a "soul."

In Yat, Cabot and Kew are imprisoned in a dungeon. Occupying the cell with them is a huge intelligent pterosaur who recognizes Cabot as Namllup the Second, son of the creator of the Whoomangs—and with whom Cabot can communicate.

"I know," wrote Cabot. "I know all that, for I am that man. Who are you?"

"I am Dohroo, and I was King of the Whoomangs until the six-armed ones dropped from the sky in their big boat. They dare not kill me, for my people would rebel. I refuse to aid them, so they keep me in this cell. Queekle Mukki, the big snake, the wise one, has turned traitor to his soul, and consorts with the invaders."

"As I remember," Cabot remarked in a grim tone to his son, "It was this snake person who cooked up the bright idea of turning me into a Whoomang." Then he wrote: "I have a grudge to pay to Queekle Mukki. Let's you and me and my son be allies."

"Your physical son?"

"Yes, but our souls are brothers."

Kew remarked, "I don't get that last."

"Well, you see——" began his father.

Groans in the corridor outside interrupted him. A Martian unlocked the door and dragged a small human-seeming figure into the cell. When they were able to obtain a good view of the newcomer, the Cabots discovered it to be a girl. Small and exquisitely formed, she was totally naked, but covered with short stiff golden fur. Kew's eyes glowed appreciatively.

The Martian gave her a vicious push and she winced and whimpered as she fell upon the floor.

"That's enough of that!" Kew cried, flinging himself at the Martian. Instantly six snaky arms were wrapped about him. Cabot darted to the rescue, but two of the three-fingered arms detached themselves from Kew and fastened upon him.

With a raucous squawk Dohroo flapped into the fray. Two well-directed pecks resulted in the release of Cabot. But when he would have returned to the attempt to free his son, the snake-like head and neck of the pterosaur shot out and gripped him by the waist.

Then the creature waddled through the open grille. Laying Cabot down unceremoniously, Dohroo shot his head back into the cell and pulled out the golden girl. Then he closed and bolted the door.

Cabot and the girl and the dragon were now safely in the corridor outside the cell, and the Martian was locked within it. But Kew was locked in with the Martian.

"My son!" Cabot cried. "Let me go back to help my son!" he flung himself against the grating.

The Martian and the struggling Kew had by now rolled up to the front of the cell near the closed door. Through the open grille beside the door shot one of the three-fingered tentacles and seized one of Cabot's wrists.

The Martian's thought flashed into Cabot's mind: "This one must not escape. He is the more important of the two."

Cabot braced his feet on the flagstones of the corridor, and pulled. But it was an uneven tug of war. Gradually he was drawn closer and closer to the bars. In vain he tried, with his other hand, to unclasp those three snaky fingers from his wrist.

Suddenly Dohroo took a part in the game. Thrusting his ungainly head over Cabot's shoulder, he ripped away the tentacle which held Cabot's wrist. Other tentacles shot through the bars. One seized Cabot's ankle, upsetting him to the floor of the

corridor; others grabbed Dohroo's beak, pried the jaws apart, and eased the hold on the tentacle which the dragon was biting.

As Cabot squirmed and tussled and pounded with his one free hand on the tentacles which held him, he saw the golden girl sit up, rub her eyes, take in the scene, and go wild-eyed with terror. With a shriek, she sprang to her feet. Then Cabot lost sight of her.

He heard a clanging of the cell door, and vaguely wondered at the sound, for he remembered that the door was already shut. Then Dohroo swarmed over him, croaking, slashing, flapping. The Martian's hands which held Cabot's wrist and ankle relaxed, and he yanked himself loose. All six tentacles now seized the winged dragon and drew him up against the bars, but Myles Cabot was free.

His first thought was of Kew but, though he peered intently into the darkness of the cell, he was unable to spot his son. Had the Martian crushed the boy into nothingness?

A soft crooning sound behind Cabot caused him to wheel. There on the ground sat the golden girl. Kew's unconscious head was in her lap, and she was smoothing his pale forehead with one tiny furry hand. Somehow Kew had escaped from the cell into the corridor.

Cabot dropped on his knees beside them and chafed his son's wrists and ankles, until the color came back, and Kew's eyes flickered open. He smiled up at his father and then at the golden girl.

Cabot pulled Kew to his feet. "Let's get going," he snapped. "That Martian has probably sent a 'sending' for help." Then in Vairkingian, "Come on, girl, before more Martians come."

Her eyes widened that this unfurry man, dressed in such outlandish apparel, should know her native tongue. But she scrambled to her feet and stood trustingly beside him.

Cabot felt a momentary qualm about deserting his ally, the winged dragon. He glanced back. The Martian was still inside the cell and the dragon outside, each gripping the other through the bars. But the dragon seemed to be getting the best of the fight, and was gradually dismembering the Martian hexapod. So Cabot, half carrying his exhausted son, with some help from the furry golden girl, set out along the flare-lit underground corridor.

They met no one, and soon came to much lighter passageways. No flares here, but rather some sort of diffused lighting. The very air seemed to glow, with no apparent source of illumination.

Finally they reached the main vaulted hall of the palace. Here there were numbers of all the varied types of animals which made up the heterogeneous race of Whoomangs. The air was filled with small flitting pterodactyls, the size of bats. Even two Martians scuttled by on their six writhing tentacles, but paid them no attention. Doubtlessly they had become so used to the conglomeration of assorted beasts which constituted the population of this city, that Cabot, Kew and the golden girl were to them merely some new and fancy kind of Whoomang.

Thus the three of them reached the plaza without interference. It was night outside, as they could tell by the black starless void of the eternal clouds above them, but the plaza was rendered as light as day by the same unexplainable diffused illumination which they had observed inside the palace.

The sky-ship in which they had been brought here still lay in the midst of the plaza. Seeing it, Cabot broke into a run. Once inside that space-ship, they would be safe.

Nothing interfered with their gaining the ship. As Cabot dashed in through its open door, he saw his automatic lying on the floor. He scooped it up and thrust it into his pocket. Then he seated himself at the now familiar controls. Kew and the Vairking girl entered behind him and closed and locked the door.

"Here we go for home!" Cabot jubilated, as he closed the proper switches and moved the proper levers.

But nothing happened. The expected hum and throb of engines did not occur. Again and again Cabot tried the controls, but without results. Finally he settled back in the pilot's seat with a sigh of disgust and resignation.

"It's no use!" he exclaimed. "We're trapped."

"Well, at least, no one can get in at us," Kew commented, glancing out through one of the portholes.

Five Martians surrounded the ship, and beyond them, at a respectful distance, there stood an ever-growing crowd of assorted Whoomangs.

Cabot shot a thought at one of the Martians outside, "What's the matter with this ship? Why can't I make it go?"

Back came the thought-impulse, "The force-collecting sphere has been removed and taken to the shops for a check-over. Come out and surrender."

"Try and get us," Cabot replied.

The five Martians withdrew for a conference beyond the range of telepathic communication. Then one of them scuttled away through the crowd.

Cabot turned to the golden girl and asked in Vairkingian, "Who are you, my dear? And how does it happen that you are a prisoner here?"

"I am Nardeen the Slim," she replied, "daughter of Jud the Excuse-Maker and Arkilu the Beautiful."

"I knew your parents well," said Cabot. "Then you are a princess?"

"Yes," the girl continued. "These bulbous creatures with six snake legs, whom you call—'Martians,' is it not?—landed on our continent about a year ago. Since then, although they are very few in numbers, they have overrun our country. Allying themselves with the Roies—wild tribes—they have driven us from our cities. Our race has had to take to the rocky fastnesses of the hills. A raiding party of the Roies captured me and sold me to the Martians, who have brought me here to be interviewed by the 'Leader.' I gather that they have some idea of using me as a hostage."

"Trying to bite off three continents at once," Cabot commented. "They may have bitten off more than they can chew."

A fluttering at one of the portholes interrupted them. It was one of the tiny bat-lizards, with a piece of paper in its mouth. Cabot opened the porthole, let it in and took and read the note:

"Myles Cabot, why do you defy me? You will starve inside that shell. Or, as a last resort, we can bomb you out. But, if you will surrender, I pledge that you three shall be our honored guests. —*The Leader.*"

He repeated the message to Kew and Nardeen, adding, "We may as well accept. These Martians do not know how to lie, although they can, of course, change their minds. Let us go to the Leader, and watch for an opening. But remember this, you two: make no plans whatever, and do not think about how to escape whenever any Martian is within twenty paces of you."

He scribbled a reply and gave the paper back to the winged messenger, which flitted away toward the palace. Presently, through the surrounding crowd of Whoomangs, a Martian appeared and waved one arm in a prearranged signal.

Cabot opened the door of the space-craft and stepped out with Kew and Nardeen. The crowd divided and the three captives followed the Martian into the palace.

He led them to the audience-chamber, where on a raised dias squatted a hexapod twice the size of the others. Cabot raised his

left arm in Cupian salute, and his two companions copied the gesture.

"You do well to pay me homage," thought the Leader. "And, as long as you maintain a respectful attitude toward our superior race, there is no reason why we cannot be friends and allies. I have come to this planet for the purpose of liberating oppressed minorities. Thus I have brought freedom to the wild men of Vairkingia, and have promised souls to the wild creatures of Whoomangia."

"But there are no oppressed minorities in Cupia," Cabot objected.

"True. And that unfortunate fact has given me considerable concern. However, I have found that your people are happy and fun-loving, working only four hours a day to produce all that they need. This is wrong. I intend to regiment the Cupians and inculcate Martian culture. Thus they will be better off, even if not so happy. In return for this privilege, your people can help us, the superior race, to conquer the Earth, where there are certainly many oppressed minorities."

The creature was obviously sincere, Cabot realized.

"Of course, I am sincere. The thoughts of we Martians are never confused. Perhaps we can teach clarity of thought to the more intelligent of you beasts. It is fortunate that I have now assembled a Crown Princess of the Vairkingians, the King of Cupia, and the greatest scientist of two worlds. Dohoo, the winged ruler of this continent, has unfortunately escaped us and has fled to the mountains, but his Premier, the serpent Queekle Mukki, has been collaborating with us for some time. —You will now be assigned quarters where you can bathe and feed and rest. King Kew and Nardeen the Slim can have the freedom of the city. But you, Myles Cabot, shall return to teach me all you know of science and of the planet Earth."

What! Myles thought. Give to this invader the scientific and factual knowledge to enable him to dominate the solar system. Never! Yet how could he evade a telepathic tapping of his mind. It was impossible. Cabot grimaced, and plunged his hands into the pockets of his jacket in a gesture of despair.

One hand touched the cold steel of the forgotten automatic. Out it came in a flash.

"Do you value your eyes?" he shouted.

But he had forgotten the guard who had brought him there. Two tentacles suddenly whipped around him from behind. One

three-fingered hand grasped his wrist and another wrested the weapon from his hand.

"Someone was very careless," came the calm thoughts of the Leader. "From now on, Myles Cabot, you will not be permitted to be armed. But this outburst will be overlooked. You are still our honored guest. May you learn from your betters courtesy, consideration and gratitude. —Take them to their quarters."

The three 'guests' saluted and were led away.

"Dad, don't lose your temper like that again," Kew warned.

"The boy is wiser than you, Myles Cabot," was the parting thought from the Leader.

The guests' quarters—if such they could be considered—were luxurious. Nardeen sobbed, and tears filled her sapphire eyes when she saw the rugs and tapestries and gaily lacquered carved wooden furniture, all evidently looted from Vairkingia. Savory Whoomangian foods were brought by Whoomang attendants.

"Let us eat one by one, at long intervals," Cabot cautioned. "The food may be drugged. They may be planning to insert 'souls' at the base of our brains, to convert us into Whoomangs. Above all things, be prepared to resist that calamity."

Nardeen was offered food first, but Kew insisted that he try it before her, as a protection to both her and his father. No ill effects were observed, so the other two took their turns at eating.

Afterwards Cabot transferred his artificial antennae, the microphone which nestled between his collar-bones, his ear-phones, and his radio belt to the girl, so that she could talk with his son. Kew, although an earless Cupian, had long ago been taught by Cabot to speak with his mouth, as is often possible with deaf-mutes on Earth. Also the two of them had become pretty fair lip-readers. But the girl did not possess this talent, so for the present the radio head-set would have to do. Later Cabot began to teach her the language of Cupia.

"For," he explained, "if we ever escape from here that is where we shall head first. I must protect my dear wife Lilla."

"But what about my own poor people?" she protested.

"I promise to organize a rescue expedition," Cabot assured her.

With an occasional appeal from Nardeen to Cabot to translate some word for her, she conversed with Kew for about half an hour. All three then bathed and lay down on sleeping rugs for the night.

The next morning assorted Whoomang attendants brought three clean Cupian togas. Nardeen demurred against donning hers, protesting that in her country only the peasantry wore

clothes, but finally she acquiesced at Kew's insistence. Cabot's beard was beginning to sprout, but a razor was denied him, for fear that he might use it as a weapon.

The two young folks then went out for a tour of the city, while Cabot was summoned to an audience with the Leader. This time two intermediate sized hexapods shared the throne with their Chief. They were the leading scientists of Mars.

Before answering any questions, Cabot asked a few, and they were graciously answered. He learned that Queekle Mukki, the snake Premier, alone of all the Whoomangs, could neither receive nor send thoughts to the conquerors. Also that certain small catlike animals of the country could receive perfectly, although their own minds could not be tapped. With a grin of amusement, Cabot recalled the words of Oliver Herford's poem:

"Observe the cat upon this page.
Philosophers of every age,
The very wisest of the wise,
Have tried her mind to analyze
In vain, for nothing can they learn
She baffles them at every turn.
Like Mr. Hamlet in the play
She leads their reasoning astray.
She feigns an interest in string
Or yarn or any rolling thing.
Unlike the dog, she does not care
With common man her thoughts to share.
She teaches us that, in life's walk,
'Tis better to let others talk;
And listen, while they say instead
The foolish things we might have said."

How true! He salted these two bits of information away in the back of his mind, but was very careful not to dwell on them, lest his hosts become suspicious.

Cat-animals, the Martians told him, were being slaughtered wherever found, as their uncanny ability to read telepathic utterances, and yet keep their own thoughts, was considered a menace to the existing regime.

Next Cabot inquired about the force-engines of the sky-ships. Again there was projected for him the same series of thought-images which had been given him earlier by the Martians aboard the ship. Once more he was unable to make anything of this alleged explanation.

"And this," sneered one of the learned hexapods, "is what earthmen call the greatest scientist of two worlds!"

To cloak his embarrassment, Cabot asked about the diffused lighting he had observed. Fortunately for his reputation, he was able to understand this, for it was analogous to the radio device for setting up artificial fever within the human body, in common use on Earth. By somewhat similar means, an induced field caused the air to glow and give off light.

The three Martians then interrogated him in regard to the war-weapons of the two planets they planned to colonize.

These conferences were resumed day after day. Sometimes Queekle Mukki, the huge snake, was also present, but the necessity of his writing his questions and having to receive written answers in reply, slowed up the conferences to such an extent that he was seldom invited.

Nardeen and Kew spent many happy hours together. The girl became proficient with the Cupian language, and Kew in turn learned much Vairkingian. The two reported to Cabot a growing unrest among the populace, who believed Cabot to be a reincarnation of the mythical Namllup, and were demanding that he be released to rule over them. Several mass-executions failed to put an end to this subversive religious uprising.

Finally Kew and Nardeen had to be confined to their rooms, lest they too become objects of worship.

After several weeks of interrogating, the Martian inquisitors had just about pumped Cabot's mind dry of scientific information. Then the Leader announced his plans: "You, Cabot, will be put to death in public, in order that these misguided Whoomangs may realize that you are not their long-lost god."

"But you promised me——" Cabot began.

"Stop!" the Leader launched a preemptory thought at him. "What license has a mere lower animal, such as you, to question the rights of a Martian to change his mind. I change my mind from day to day, as the exigencies of the immediate occasion demand.

"A common characteristic of dictators," Cabot drily observed, but full intendment of his remarks was lost on his hearers. "And when you have disposed of me, what do you plan for Nardeen and Kew?"

"Several of our exploring ships have recently been shot down over Cupia by anti-aircraft guns," the Leader replied with apparent irrelevance.

"Good!" Cabot exulted. "The Princess Lilla has not been idle in organizing our defenses."

"But we can put a stop to it," the Leader testily replied. "We will take Kew with us as a hostage. The Cupians will not shoot down their young King."

"To save her people Lilla would even destroy her own son. And Kew himself would willingly die, rather than become your tool."

"That is a mere wish, rather than your real belief. I am learning how to interpret even your confused thoughts, O Cabot. —Take him away. Tomorrow he dies."

Back in his quarter again with Kew and Nardeen, Cabot slumped upon the sleeping rugs, took his radio speech-apparatus from the golden girl and told them the gloomy news. An exalted light glowed in the young King's eyes. "I will kill myself, rather than force Mother to kill me," he declared.

"Now hold your horses!" Cabot exclaimed. "A live Kew may yet be able to save his people. Martyrdom isn't all it's cracked up to be. Nine times out of ten it's a mere quixotic waste."

Nardeen put her hand in Kew's, and pressed her furry body close to him. "I want you to live," she breathed.

For a long time the three were silent.

Suddenly Cabot sprang to his feet. "I have it!" he exclaimed.

"Some way of escape?" they asked eagerly.

"No. No. I have figured out the source of the power which drives their space-ships. It's the cosmic rays. Compton long ago discovered that one ray in approximately every thousand, instead of rebounding from a lead plate, causes a spatter. This spatter was supposed to be merely electrons released by the direct impingement of a cosmic ray on an atom of lead. But the Martians——"

"Hold on, Dad!" Kew interrupted. "If you aren't the incorrigible scientist! Here you are, on the eve of being executed, more interested in cosmic rays than in your own fate."

"Kew, son," Cabot soberly replied, "I may die, but science goes marching on. You, who are to live, must listen, so that you can pass the information on to others."

"Okay, Dad," Kew agreed, resignedly.

Cabot continued, "The Martians have learned how to cause practically every ray to spatter. They have discovered that each of the hundreds of new rays which result from each spatter is in turn a true cosmic ray itself. Spatter and re-spatter and re-re-spatter. Each single cosmic force-impulse which enters through

the orifice of that lead globe becomes multiplied billions and trillions of times. This is similar to the force-releasing atom-smashing which earth scientists have developed to some extent. A single cosmic particle has an electric potential of ten billion volts. All that is needed is amperage, and that is furnished by spatter-multiplication.

By now Kew had become interested, though Nardeen pouted and clung to his arm. "But how do they utilize all this power, Dad?"

"By surrounding the globe with capacities. If given time, I believe I could work out the hook-up myself." His clear gray eyes narrowed introspectively.

A thought from the doorway interrupted him: "You will not be given time, Myles Cabot, for tomorrow you die." It was the Leader, looking in on them.

Cabot was already standing. Kew and Nardeen leaped to their feet. All three gave the Cupian salute.

"Come in, sir," Cabot invited.

"I can see that you intend me no harm," said the Martian. "But you might change your mind."

"No danger, if you will tell me the secrets of your force-machine."

Thus reassured, the hexapod slithered into the room.

"The principles are really very simple," he announced, "although I doubt if your inferior mentality can grasp them."

"And yet you learned much of world science from my 'inferior mentality,' as you call it."

"True, true. You are very learned in some fields, and yet show surprising gaps in others. Well, the idea is this: You have correctly deduced the principles as far as you have gone. The capacities which surround the sphere—— Help! Help! The Leader is attacked!"

For Kew, taking advantage of the preoccupation of the creature's mind, had suddenly flung a sleeping-rug over The Leader's head. Cabot instantly sensed the situation. He stamped his heel on a groping three-fingered tentacle which was reaching out beneath the edge of the rug; then flung another rug on top.

Kew tore down a curtain cord and wrapped it around and around the strange bundle. Nardeen ran to shut and lock the door.

But the power of the trapped Martian was tremendous. Bulging terrifically, it burst the cord which held it.

Cabot picked up a wooden bench and crashed it down on the writhing mass. The Martian contracted in a convulsion of pain.

"More rugs!" Cabot demanded, and Kew and Nardeen were quick to obey. More cord was brought and wrapped around the bundle. But, one by one, the bulging creature burst them.

"Open the door!" Cabot commanded.

Nardeen did so, while Cabot and Kew seized a bench and pushed the squirming mass out into the hall.

But the rugs unrolled and a single long tentacle shot out and gripped Cabot's foot.

Then Nardeen slammed the door. The severed three-fingered hand quivered for a moment and lay still. Panting, the three humans piled bench and box and couch against the door, and braced themselves.

Something battered against the door from the other side. At each blow it gave a quarter of an inch. They realized that it would be only a matter of minutes before their attackers would gain entry.

Then a raucous croak sounded behind them. Turning their heads they saw Dohroo, the winged dragon, perched like a huge gargoyle on the window sill. He beckoned to them with a wing-claw, but they shook their heads and redoubled their effort to hold the door.

Stretching his heron-like neck, Dohroo plucked the curtain-rod from above the window and hurled it at Cabot's feet; then pointed to it with one wing.

Cabot understood. Snatching up the pole, he braced it in a crack of the flagging of the floor and held it against the piled furniture. The door ceased to yield.

"Kew, you and Nardeen go to the window," he panted.

They raced to the huge pterosaur. He prodded them with his wings until they sensed his meaning and each clung to an arm beneath the wings. Again he beckoned.

The pounding on the door had stopped. But suddenly a snaky tentacle shot through the crack and snatched the curtain-rod from Cabot's hands. Hastily he backed away. The door slid slowly open and a score of Martians scuttled in. Cabot fled to the window-sill. Then the sharp beak of the pterosaur, flashing here and there like a rapier, held the advancing horde at bay. Cabot, powerless to aid, stared out the window.

It was night outside, but the city was lit with the permeating radio-induced glow. The courtyard below was filled with an intent throng of Martians and assorted Whoomangs. He glimpsed

a shadow over him and, glancing up, saw a Martian being lowered from the window above, one of its tentacles clasping that of another Martian above it.

"Look out!" Cabot cried.

Although spoken words were unintelligible to Dohroo, the beast evidently sensed the warning tone. He grabbed Cabot with both hind claws and threw himself backward from the window, dropping precipitously toward the ground below.

Cabot shut his eyes and braced himself for the crash against the pavement. But with a jerk that almost tore him from the creature's clutch, the leathery wings opened and stayed their descent. In another moment Dohroo was flapping ponderously, circling upward again.

As they passed the window out of which they had fallen, Dohroo veered close to the wall and took a peck at the clasped hands of the Martian who hung at the window and of his fellow who was holding him lowered there. The grip parted, and with a mental shriek of agony, the hanging Martian plummeted down to spatter upon the pavement below.

Then Dohroo with his three living burdens was off through the night across the housetops of Yat toward the dark nothern mountains of the Whoomangian hinterland.

Soon the city was a mere glow on the horizon behind them. Then the weary pterosaur flapped down to the ground and deposited his equally weary burdens.

Nardeen was in a state of near collapse. "I couldn't have hung on for another minute," she gasped. "My arms are nearly pulled out at the sockets, and my fingers are numb." She flexed and unflexed them.

"How about *Dohroo's* sockets, with you two young people hanging onto his shoulders?" Cabot countered.

"What do you suppose his plans are?" Kew asked. "He can't talk to tell us, and in this pitch darkness he can't write notes to us."

"All we can do is wait for morning," Cabot replied. "Come on, folks, gather leaves and make yourselves beds."

The ground was rocky where they stood. The night was black as only nights on Venus can be. But the three Venusians—two native, and the third an adopted son of the planet for twenty years—were used to the Venusian darkness. With much stumbling and groping they found a big-leaved bush and a rock to shelter them from the prevailing winds, and soon were comfortably bedded and covered and sound asleep.

As the eastern sky turned to royal purple, then pink, then silver, Cabot stirred and opened his eyes.

A short distance from him lay Kew and Nardeen, wrapped in each other's arms, still sleeping peacefully. Cabot smiled reminiscently. Thus had the Princess Lilla snuggled in his arms like a trusting child, one night twenty years ago when they had fled together from the ant-men. Why must life on Venus consist so recurrently in flights from alien beings?

He glanced around at the landscape, swiftly emerging from the mists of morning. Rocky, desolate slopes with here and there a boulder or a bush of large heart-shaped leaves to relieve the monotony. Then suddenly he sat bolt upright and flung off his protective covering of leaves. Dohroo, the winged King of the Whoomangs, was nowhere to be seen.

He took careful note of the direction in which the sky had first lightened, then scratched a cross on the rock, which he labelled with E, S, W, and N. What good would it do him, however, to know the points of the compass, inasmuch as he did not know in what direction Dohroo had flown with them from the capital city of Whoomangia? Wrack his brains as he would, he could not recall any landmark seen as they left the city—his mind had been in too much of a jumble from the then recent battle to take note of signs as he usually did.

He sighed. That little slip might lose a war.

Nardeen stirred and opened her sapphire eyes, then flushed deeply as she disengaged Kew's strong young arms from about her. Kew too stirred, sat up, stretched his limbs and yawned, then grinned sheepishly at his father and Nardeen.

"Well," he announced, "here we are, wherever that is?"

Cabot shrugged his shoulders.

"Look!" cried the girl, pointing toward the northern horizon where a black speck showed in the sky, growing larger as it approached them.

"Down! Down!" Cabot commanded.

They huddled together behind the rock.

Nearer came the black shape. Now they could make out its form. A winged craft of some sort. A winged creature. A huge pterosaur. Dohroo!

Jumping to their feet, they all waved to him. He spied them, circled, descended, and flapped to an abrupt landing atop the rock. In his beak he carried a branch laden with orange-like fruit, breakfast for his friends.

Cabot started to grope in his pockets for pencil and paper,

only to discover that he wore a Cupian toga without the customary pouch. So he scratched a message with a sharp pebble on the slatelike ground: "Thanks, old friend. Where are we?"

Dohroo scratched a reply, "Only a dozen stads north of Yat. Pursuit ships will soon be out scouring the countryside for us. Eat quickly, for we must away."

"Where to?"

"To an impregnable cave in the mountains."

Hurriedly they ate the fruit which he had brought them. Then, with Cabot and Kew clinging to his shoulders and little Nardeen clasped tightly but tenderly in his hind claws, Dohroo took wing once more.

The arms of the two men were nearly breaking, and Dohroo was visibly tiring, just barely skimming the ground with strained and jerking flaps, when they sighted a sheer cliff looming ahead.

For many minutes they rested at its foot. Half a mile it towered above them, and near the top of its face they could just make out a small black opening. To this cave-mouth the winged Whoomang carried them, one by one, in his claws.

As the last trip was being completed, one of the black and silver ships of the Martians sped up from the south. They had been seen.

Cabot made a rapid mental measurement of the cave-mouth. Wide enough for the ship to enter and land.

"Come on!" he cried. "We must block the entrance!"

The floor of the cave was covered with the debris of ages. Cabot and Kew seized splintered slabs of rock and dragged them to the mouth of the cave. Nardeen followed suit with smaller pieces. Dohroo, catching on, flapped back and forth bringing larger stones than any of them. But the opening was by no means blocked when the ship arrived.

Straight for the cave opening it sped. The four fugitives crouched behind their barrier.

"If it dives in over us, we'll have to spring out and away," Cabot announced, indicating the same message by signs to Dohroo. The pterosaur nodded his huge head.

But the Martian ship veered suddenly away.

"Cowards!" Cabot exulted.

His joy was short-lived, for the ship wheeled and came scudding back along the face of the cliff.

Cabot sensed the intent.

"Back! Back!" he shouted. They are going to bomb us."

And as they raced for the rear of the cave, a splintering crash

shook the cliffside. An avalanche of rock descended, nearly blocking the entrance.

Cabot shrugged his broad shoulders and laughed aloud.

"They've done in an instant what it would have taken us days to accomplish. We need fear them no more."

He peered out over the newly-formed parapet of debris. The Martian ship was landing on the plain below. Two other ships landed, and there emerged six Martians who began to construct a rough shelter of rocks.

"We're in for a siege," Cabot announced. "We're safe enough in here, but what'll we do for food and bedding?" He pantomined the question in the air in short-hand characters.

For reply, the pterosaur scratched on the floor of the cavern. "On the plateau above there are orange-trees and heart-shaped leaf bushes and small cat-rabbits which are very good eating. For me to fly out and up there would attract attention, but there is a shaft at the rear of the cave which may lead up there."

"Let's explore," Cabot suggested.

So he and Kew and Nardeen groped their way back and upward, as Dohroo squatted in the cave to await their return.

It was a long hard climb. But at last they saw light ahead, and finally emerged on the surface of the plateau. Orange trees abounded. When they had slacked their thirst with the fruit, Cabot set to work fashioning a bow and arrow of orange wood, by the laborious process of scraping with sharp stones. Kew and Nardeen helped. By braiding strips torn from his toga, he made a crude bow-string. At last his weapons were completed.

A tiny furry creature scampered across the rocks. It had a catlike head on a rabbitlike body. Cabot whistled. The little beast sat up on its haunches for an instant to listen. Cabot let fly an arrow, and the little creature fell from the rock. It kicked for a moment, then lay still.

Nardeen came running up. "Oh, what a shame!" she cried. "The poor little thing!"

"We must eat," Cabot grimly reminded her. He pulled out the arrow and stalked on in search of other prey.

Rounding a rock he came silently on several of the little animals nibbling from the leaves of a small bush. Motioning to Nardeen and Kew for silence, he took several arrows in hand for a succession of quick shots.

But a sharp metallic click sounded to one side, and the little creatures all plunged into burrows. Glancing in the direction from which the warning click had come, Cabot saw one of the

cat-rabbits sitting erect and staring at him. As he wheeled to launch an arrow at it, it clicked again derisively, and it too plunged down a hole. And now all around him clicks began to sound.

"The place is swarming with them," he said, "but they evidently have a telegraphic system of warning each other."

"I heard nothing," said Kew.

"Of course not, poor boy. That is one of the disadvantages of your Cupian lack of ears. Some day I'll make you a headset which will be the converse of mine, so that you can receive sounds, just as I can hear the broadcasts from your antennae."

His attention was now attracted by one of the animals, which had come out of its hole and was standing facing him a short distance away. But, as he slowly raised his bow, the little creature waved in the air with one fore-paw.

Cabot paused fascinated, for it was writing in space in porovian shorthand, "I am not a cat-rabbit."

"What are you then?" Cabot waved with his index finger.

"A Whoomang, driven from my house by the Martian invaders, and forced to live in these rocks among my wild brothers. Are you Namllup?"

"I am Namllup the Second. You are safe with me."

He lowered his bow, and the little creature scampered forward.

"Oh, the darling!" cried Nardeen, dropping to her knees beside it.

"You don't realize the half of it," Cabot informed her. "This cat, or rabbit, or mathlab, or whatever, is going to be more than a pretty pet for my lady. He is going to be a spy for us among the enemy. For he can read their thoughts, and they can't read his. The Leader told me so. That is why the Martians, realizing them to be a menace to their plans, tried to exterminate them. The only trouble is that this little creature can't talk to us. Writing is going to be an awfully slow means of communication."

"Why not teach him Morse code?" Kew suggested.

"Son, I believe you have something there!" Cabot admiringly exclaimed.

Kneeling down, he scratched a brief message of his intentions on the rocks. The animal signified his consent, especially when he learned that his King, Dohroo the pterosaur, was with them.

"What is your name, little friend?" Cabot wrote.

The written reply was long and unpronounceable.

"Well, I guess I'll have to call you Jack, for short. —Let's get back to the cave. Nardeen, you and Kew gather leaves. I'll

pick a bunch of oranges and carry the dead cat-rabbit. Jack can follow us all right, I guess."

He found the dead animal swarming with small brown moths.

Jack hopped up, cocked his head on one side, and studied the corpse for a moment. Then waved the message, "Wild souls, laying their eggs."

Cabot scratched on the ground, "Can wild souls be used to turn animals into Whoomangs?"

"That's where Namllup got them from, originally."

"I think we'll leave this right here, and report it to Dohroo. Maybe, with a little practice, we can create a whole army of allies."

He sat up a cairn of small rocks to mark the spot, gathered an armful of orange-branches, and made his way back down the shaft to the cave, followed by Kew and Nardeen and the little cat-rabbit, Jack.

The big pterosaur, Dohroo, was enthusiastic over the prospects of breeding souls. "You must bring the carcass down here," he said, "so that we can watch over it. The eggs will not hatch for about a week. Meanwhile we can catch some of the little animals like Jack, so as to have them ready to practice on."

In the days that followed, the five allies kept very busy. Little Jack learned the Morse code readily, with Kew as teacher, for, although Kew could not *hear* the sound of the little creature's clicks, he could *feel* them by placing his fingertips on Jack's head.

Dohroo, the winged dragon, also learned the Morse code, for he too could make the click sound. In fact, this sound had been for many years the common means of oral communication among the Whoomangs, although only in a crude limited way, to signal the simplest commands, and to open and close royal conclaves.

They all had to forego their proposed diet of cat-rabbits, for Jack objected to the slaughter of any of his wild relatives. But they found a crystal-clear pond, teeming with fish, on the plateau above, and Dohroo taught them how to make the cakes of pulverized fish-meat and wild grains which formed the staple article of Whoomangian diet.

Nardeen the Slim deftly wove a large fine-meshed net out of tough fibers of the same plants which furnished the wild grain.

Several times in early evening, under the cover of darkness, Dohroo would take little Jack in his claws and fly down with him to the plain below. Jack would then hop up to the Martian encampment and listen to the thoughts of the Martians. But the information which he brought back was never of very much use,

for he was such a scatter-brained little fellow that he seemed wholly incapable of picking out the important items from the mass of mental conversation which he eavesdropped, nor even of remembering correctly the items which he selected.

One day when Cabot, accompanied by Jack, emerged from the top of the shaft to scout the plateau above, he was startled to see a Martian sky-ship parked near the edge of the cliff. Taking instant cover in some bushes, he sent the little cat-rabbit to reconnoitre; and this time, fortunately, Jack picked up the right thought-impulses, and reported them fairly completely and correctly. The enemy were erecting a winch at the brink of the cliff, preparatory to lowering one of their number to the cave-mouth with a supply of hand-grenades.

Instantly Cabot's plans were made. Not trusting to Jack's erratic memory, he scratched full directions in Cupian shorthand on some small thin pieces of slate, and dispatched the little creature with the message to Dohroo. Then he sneaked as close to the Martians as he could get without being within thought-range, and waited.

He saw one of the two hexapods lower the other over the edge. He saw the rope gradually pay out from the winch. Then came the agreed-on signal roar of Dohroo, sounding faintly from below. Cabot rose, took deliberate aim with his bow, and sped an arrow into the bulbous head of the Martian. In his previous experience with these creatures he had noted the evident lack of effect of bullets, except for the destruction of eyes, or the temporary paralyzing of tentacles. But his well-aimed arrow not only put out one of the creature's six eyes—it also seemed to mess up its entire internal operations. With a mental shriek, which Cabot was now near enough to sense, it seized the wooden shaft with all six of its hands and strove to yank it out. But the barb still held.

Stepping closer, Cabot carefully let fly five more arrows in rapid succession. The Martian was rendered impotent. All six of its eyes were now gone, and its domed head was interlaced with wooden spits. Its tentacles relaxed, and it sprawled helpless and dying on the rocky ground.

But at that instant one of the tentacles of the Martian below appeared over the edge of the cliff. The creature had crawled up the rope. And Cabot's arrows were now all gone.

Leaping to the winch, he released its brake. The rope slackened. But the three fingers of the tentacle grasped the cliff-rim and held on. Other tentacles appeared and inched slowly forward.

In desperation, Cabot seized a large rock and began pounding on the clawing fingers. One by one they relaxed. But another tentacle lanced out and gripped him by the ankle, spilling him to the ground.

He grabbed hold of a bush. The bush came loose, pulled up by the roots.

He dug his fingers into a crack in the rocky surface of the ground. Bloody and torn, his fingers at last lost hold. Closer and closer to the brink he was dragged.

He braced his other heel against a rock, but the rock gradually gave way. Then it and he slid to the edge, and over. A sheer drop of two thousand feet to the plain below!

With one last despairing effort, Cabot grabbed the edge of the cliff with his mangled hands. The grip on his ankle relaxed. The tentacular hand of his enemy slipped off. He was free! But he was hanging in space by numbed fingers.

For a few moments he hung there until he had regained his breath. He looked down and around.

Nardeen's net, enveloping the squirming hexapod, was being drawn into the mouth of the cave.

"I hope that my friends see me and spread the net for me," he thought. "No. I hope they don't, for that would lose our prisoner. I can get back up somehow."

He planted his feet on a small slanting ledge, and thus relieved the strain on his sorely torn hands. Then gradually working his feet along this ledge, and his hands along the summit, he raised first his head and then his shoulders and then his chest above the edge. Bending-forward, he lay for a while and panted. Then extending one hand slowly to a crack well inland, he took a firm hold on it and pulled himself to safety.

After resting thoroughly, he tore some strips off his already disheveled toga and bound up his lacerated hands. Then he inspected the Martian ship. It was identical to the one which he had captured at Luno Castle and had piloted in his disastrous air-fight in the Okarze Mountains. And it was fully equipped with bombs.

First taking a practice flight along the plateau so as to get the feel of the controls, he steered for the edge and nose-dived straight at the Martian encampment.

Four enemy hexapods were slithering around outside their fort, in evident great concern over the debacle of the attempt of their two comrades to gain entrance to the cave. Before they could reach the shelter of their own two ships or of their fort,

Cabot had rained a shower of bombs among them, blasting them to pulpy bits.

Landing beside their ships, he cautiously explored with grenades in hand to make sure that no other Martians were lurking anywhere nearby. There were none.

He waved and shouted up at the cave-mouth, but no response came. Probably his friends, in fear of reprisals, were huddling in the rear of the cave.

Cabot felt suddenly let-down and weak. His lacerated hands throbbed excruciatingly. Water! That's what he wanted, water. Cool water, in which to dip his feverish hands. He swept his eyes around the plain and saw, a short distance away, a line of lush vegetation which indicated the presence of a watercourse of some sort. He hobbled over to it, his mind now bent on relieving the throbbing of his hands.

But intent as he was on his mission, his attention was diverted by a blue-flowered bush which he passed. What first drew him was the color of its large lily-shaped flowers. Never had he seen such a perfect, such a compelling, heavenly blue! More cooling and crystal clear seemed these flowers than any mere pool of water could possibly be. Their color rang like a bell. It had something of the heart-gripping pathos of a moonlit white birch tree, or the silver-sweet note of a New Hampshire wood-thrush, or the tinkling voice of his own dear Lilla, Princess of Cupia.

For several long minutes Myles Cabot stood and feasted his eyes on that perfect etherial blue. Then his glance traveled downward over the rest of the plant.

Its upper portion was a mass of furry branches like monkeys' tails, which seemed to writhe with constant undulations in the breeze. The lower leaves were quite different. Wide and long and velvety, they spread out flat around the base of the plant, with the size and texture of woolen blankets.

The plant grew out of the top of a mound of what, from a distance, appeared to be white stones and gravel. But now Cabot saw that this pile was composed of bleached bones—bones of all sizes, from all sorts of animals.

A slight change in the breeze wafted down the scent of the blue flowers—a soothing scent intensely sweet: gardenia, or hyacinth, or water heliotrope. Drawn by some impelling urge, Cabot mounted the crumbling crackling pile of bones and lifted his tortured hands, as in prayer, to the blue flowers which smiled down upon him. Instantly there came surcease—the hands stopped throbbing and burning. A great peace descended over

the pain-wracked man; but with it a lassitude, a need for rest and sleep.

The blanket-like lower leaves were spread invitingly before him. He laid himself down upon them as upon a bed, soft and comfortable! The stalk of the plant inclined itself slightly, and a drop of nectar from one of the azure flowers fell upon his upturned face. With a deep intake of breath he inhaled its fragrance. The plant bent lower. Its monkey-tail branches began to smooth Cabot's brow, to pat his shoulders and his arms.

Lulled by this soft massage, Cabot sighed deeply, closed his eyes, and slept, at peace with all the world.

"Myles, dear," spoke a silvery voice.

He opened his eyes, and somehow was not at all surprised to find himself lying on a tapestried couch in one of the garden-courtyards of the Palace at Kuana. The Princess Lilla was seated beside him, running her cool slender fingers across his brow. He smiled weakly up at her perfect oval face.

A virile voice spoke nearby. "Well, Dad, you've had a long hard pull, but I guess you'll be okay now."

His son, Kew. All was well, then. His nerve-wracking adventures with the Martian invaders had been only a nightmare, engendered by the delirium of his illness.

But in the midst of his rejoicing he noticed a small brown snake slithering across the pavement of the courtyard, straight toward his wife.

"Look out, Lilla!" he tried to shout, but the words would not form themselves on his lips. He strove to rise, but Lilla firmly held his shoulders down.

Other snakes were now gliding toward them in the wake of the first. Hundreds of silent brown snakes! They reached the couch. They swarmed over it and over him. Yet still Lilla held him powerless. He tried to kick them off, but Kew, his son, strode forward and grasped his feet.

Cabot glanced despairingly, appealingly up at his wife, but there was no help there. Her face had lost its sweetness—had become harsh and grim. Her big sapphire eyes became bigger, nearer, bluer. A strong heady perfume exuded from her gown. Water heliotrope, that's what it was. He had never known this dainty creature to so douse herself with such an overpowering scent.

Then everything went black about him. It was not the black of night, nor even the black of failing vision. Rather it was a

living, moving, palpitating darkness—a black thunder-cloud that flapped and hissed and croaked.

His comfortable couch heaved him off to one side. He rolled painfully, bumping down a steep slope of sharp stones which crackled beneath him as he rolled. Anyway, he was free from that awful writhing mass of snakes!

Scrambling drunkenly to his feet, he stood swaying on the stone floor of the palace courtyard. No, it was not the courtyard; it was a rocky plain. Above him fluttered the leathery wings of his friend, Dohroo the dragon, as the beast continued to tear with beak and claws at the remnants of what once had been the plant with the fragrant heavenly blue flowers.

Cabot smiled wanly. "What's up?" he clicked in Morse code with his tongue against the roof of his mouth.

Dohroo furred his great wings and settled down beside Cabot. "The plant of death," he replied. "I got here just in time. Otherwise your bones would have been added to those in that pile."

Unfurling his wings once more and seizing Cabot by the shoulders with his powerful rear claws, the huge pterosaur flapped up to the cave-mouth and deposited his burden.

Nardeen and Kew scarcely heeded Cabot's arrival, so pre-occupied were they with the difficulties they were having with their Martian captive, who kept biting through the strands of the net with the powerful four-jawed beak at the base of his bulbous head. They were just about to give up the struggle, and heave him over the edge.

"No," said Cabot. "I have plans for him. —Dohroo, could you bring a sprig of blue flowers up here without being overcome?"

"I think so," the dragon clicked back. "If I fly fast enough, the wind should carry the fumes out of reach of my nostrils. Anyway, I'll try." He crawled to the cave-mouth and launched himself into space.

A few minutes later he was back with a cluster of the death flowers. Cabot poked it toward the writhing hexapod in the now badly torn net, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing the creature go limp and lie still.

"We've got to work fast," he announced. "Kew, go up the shaft and bring back the body of the Martian whom I killed at the top of the cliff. You'll find it lying beside a winch. —Dohroo, while Kew is gone, tell me all you know about Whoomang souls, and how to insert them into brains."

By the time Kew returned with the dead Martian, Cabot was

the master of all that the dragon knew of the subject. The Whoomangs never went so far as actually to penetrate the brain. All that was necessary was to trepan a small hole in the base of the victim's skull. The mothgrub, inserted through that hole, would instinctively do its own burrowing into the proper portion of the brain, and there take the proper steps to infuse its own personality into that of its host.

But where was the brain of a hexapod located? Myles had sampled all sciences at Harvard, even including biology, but never had he dissected an octopus. Hence his need for a cadaver to practice on, before attempting his main operation.

Kew returned with the dead Martian, but Cabot quickly discovered that sharp pieces of flint rock were no substitute for a knife.

"Perhaps there may be knives in the space-ships," suggested Kew.

"Good boy!" Cabot approved, and sent his son down to the plain with Dohroo. But he continued cutting up the bulbous head with his piece of flint.

The inside was quite unlike any animal which Cabot had ever dissected. Mostly porous space like a rubber sponge. No wonder his bullets had done so little damage! Leathery thongs, which he took to be muscles, ran from the six eyes and the four jaws. Opening one of the tentacles, he found it to be interlaced with such thongs, extending from ring to ring like the muscles along the ribs of a snake.

Among the thongs ran silvery threads, and a larger bundle of such threads ran from the back of each eyeball. Nerves probably. Cabot traced these nerves to a common focus at the center of the sponge-rubber mass—a round hard object about the size of a tennis-ball. Cutting into this, he found it to be composed of tightly wound silver wires like the armature of an electric motor. This, he felt, must be the brain.

By the time that Kew returned with a knife, the captive Martian had begun to stir. Nardeen poked the branch of blue flowers at him, and he subsided.

Cabot made a careful incision in the Martian's dome; and, avoiding any muscles or nerves, penetrated to the tennis ball brain. In it he made a tiny puncture. Selecting from the body of the dead cat-rabbit the largest, strongest maggot he could find, Cabot inserted it into the Martian brain, then closed the gap through which he had been operating. The spongy material seemed to adhere again naturally, requiring no sutures.

"Well," he announced, "all we've got to do now is wait. Dohroo says that it takes only a few hours for the new soul to gain mastery. By the time the Martian comes out from under the effects of the blue flower, he ought to be a Whoomang."

"One of us!" Dohroo added, with grim staccato clicks.

Up to now Cabot had been so intent on his dissection of the dead Martian and his soul-grafting operation on the living one, that he had forgotten the lacerated condition of his hands. But with the letdown following his preoccupation, they began to throb again.

The sight of the blue flowers lying on the floor of the cave gave him an idea. Picking up one of the blossoms he crushed it between his fingers. Instant relief followed.

Cabot grinned. "There are many uses for this lethal plant."

A rattling of falling pebbles sounded in the shaft which extended upward from the rear of the cave. Snatching up his bow and arrows in his now numbed hands, Cabot cried, "Someone comes! Our hiding place is discovered!"

(To be Concluded)

IF YOU LIKE FARLEY, YOU'LL WANT:

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THE OMNIBUS OF TIME: We have recently located forty copies of this famous book on time travel which we will sell at the regular purchase price of \$3.50 as long as they last. Included are such stories as *The Man Who Met Himself*, *Time for Sale*, *Rescue Into the Past*, *A Month a Minute*, *Stranded in Time*, etc. As well as the *After Math*, a 5000 word discussion of time-travel. No dust wrappers available. This was one of F.P.C.I.'s best sellers.

F.P.C.I., 1855 W. Main St., Alhambra, Calif. 91801

RATING SPACEWAY

We were both surprised and pleased at the moderate flood of mail we received after the publication of the revived SPACEWAY. We had been under the impression that few readers would remember it. There was also the fact that the printer and binder together almost wrecked the mag, and it is because of this that the issue you are now reading was so long delayed.

Because this was the first revival issue, we are going to present as many letters, or extracts from them, as we can.

Dwain Kaiser, Upland, Calif.:

"Nicer Christmas cheer I couldn't ask for than to see the return of SPACEWAY. . . . What really surprised me was the quality of this "first" issue. Perhaps I remembered the old SPACEWAY too much by the last issues before it folded, or maybe my memory is playing tricks on me again, but I didn't remember it being this good. . . . While I liked the material I'm afraid I can't say the same for the artwork you used."

Our apologies to Mr. Kaiser that we can't publish his entire letter.

Darrell Schweitzer, Strafford, Pa.:

"I can't say I'm glad to see SPACEWAY back because I was only four years old when it collapsed. The Jan. issue is quite good although many of the stories are a far-cry from plausible. . . . I hope SPACEWAY is successful. . . . Can we have a traditional 15 page letter column? How about fanzine reviews?"

Fifteen pages of letters in a digest-size mag? Will you settle for two or three? We have some additional column material which we will use as soon as possible.

John Cockroff of Palo Alto, Calif.:

"Glad to see SPACEWAY again. Perhaps some day you will revive Marvel Tales."

Ray Reistoffer of Marcus, Iowa:

"I recently picked up a copy of SPACEWAY. Glad to see you back in business again. Maybe now I can finish 'Radio Minds of Mars.' . . . Sure hope you keep Forry's column. He's really great."

Daniel W. Preston, Grand Forks, N. Dak.:

"Recently I came upon Vol. 1, No. 2 of SPACEWAY. It was a pretty good magazine. Yesterday I came upon the newest issue and it was pretty good too."

Tom Bertonneau of Malibu, Calif.:

"I am an avid reader and collector of science fiction and I find your magazine quite enjoyable. I never thought I would see the comeback of a magazine of the likes of SPACEWAY. When compared to SPACEWAY, '....' and '....' appear somewhat stuffy."

Don Thompson, Mentor, Ohio, objects:

"Yes, indeed, 'sci-fi' (hyikh) is the abbreviation for science fiction most widely used in the world today." However, it is used by persons

who know nothing about the field and it is applied primarily by reviewers in search of derogatory adjectives for the latest Japanese monster misch-masch. People who like science fiction call it 'sf' or even, in their quaint old-fashioned way, 'science fiction.' Does 4e pronounce it 'fie-ction?' "

Perhaps Forrest J will answer this...

George Fowler, Lexington, Ky.:

"I enjoyed the Jan. issue very much. May you publish SPACEWAY for many years. You ought to have a column where you preview the next issue. You should also have a story contest to stimulate interest in selling to SPACEWAY."

Give us time, George, give us time.

Richard Minter, an old-acquaintance, Eden, N.C.:

"Congratulations on the revival of SPACEWAY. Good luck with it. I'll mention it to some of my customers. I'd like to see some John R. Fearn stories reprinted in SPACEWAY."

Gary Dorst, Madison, Wis.:

"Though I am more of a 'horror' film fan I greatly enjoyed the article by 4e Ackerman."

Richard Wilson, s-f writer, Syracuse, N.Y.:

"It is sure good to see SPACEWAY again. Also great to see Morris Dollens' work once more—his fine illustrations were features of my hektographed s-f News Letter back in the dark ages. Good luck to you."

L. D. Nunley of McMinnville, Tenn.:

"I never heard of SPACEWAY until I picked up your Jan. copy. I thoroughly enjoyed it and wish to congratulate you. ... You seem to be worried about reprints. Don't be. Your reprints are just like new to me. ... The very best of luck to you."

Thanks.

Long time fan Oswald Train, Philadelphia, Pa.:

"I received a pleasant surprise when I stopped at the newsstand and found the new SPACEWAY on sale. I am very glad to know that you are getting back into the game and wish you success in your venture. ... THE RADIO MINDS OF MARS particularly interests me, for I have been a fan of the Radio series since 1930."

Bruce White of Bloomington, Ind.:

"I lately purchased a copy of your science fiction magazine SPACEWAY. It is the best science fiction magazine I have read in a long time. The stories I liked best (in order) were: 'The Gentle People,' 'The Shell Dome,' 'Slaves of the System,' 'The Third Empire,' 'Block Party.' But I must admit that the thing I really liked best was the 'Letter' of Forrest J. Ackerman. ... Happiness is a science fiction magazine called SPACEWAY!"

Wow!

M. G. Zaharakis, Minot, N. Dak.:

"It is with pleasure that I take note of the revival of SPACEWAY."

Thomas A. Chicarella of Brooklyn, N. Y.:

My compliments on the continuation of SPACEWAY. I enjoyed issue No. 1, Vol. 4 quite a bit. Particularly 'The Gentle People' and 'The Radio Minds of Mars.' I am anxiously awaiting the next issue in order to learn the outcome of the conflict between Mars and Venus."

Looks like you'll have to wait one more issue. We seem to have underestimated the length of this story and were unable to get it all into this issue.

M. B. Tepper of Pacific Palisades, Calif.:

"Congratulations on the resurrection of SPACEWAY! It has been a long time since the last issue when you left us in mid-air with the first installment of Farley's 'Radio Minds of Mars.' Just think, in two months I'll be able to read the long-awaited second part of the Senator's novel...."

Well, part of it anyway....

Gary Fagan of Ponca City, Okla.:

"What does one say? Your magazine is great! It's most outstanding feature is 'A Letter from Mr. Sci-Fi.' No other magazine has such an information packed feature."

Lewis B. Martin, Boulder, Colo.:

"Enjoyed your magazine. Keep up the good work. Suggest you get a few illustrations from Tom Walker.... Cazedessus lives in Evergreen, Colo., not Evergreen, Conn. (p. 75)."

Sorry about that. Blame the P.O.'s new official abbreviations. (Mr. Cazedessus publishes the advertising fan magazine mentioned in Mr. Ackerman's column. The exact address is: C. Cazedessus, Jr., P. O. Box 550, Evergreen, Colo. 80439.)

Jerry Page, Atlanta, Ga.—who has stories scheduled for future issues.:

"Welcome back. SPACEWAY is a welcome returnee to the science fiction field. ... Do you have any idea of what it's like to wait 14 years to finish a serial whose first installment was as much fun as 'Radio Minds of Mars?' Ratings: 'Radio Minds of Mars,' 'Unwanted Heritage,' 'Him,' 'Lethal Planetoid,' 'The Third Empire' and 'The Shell Dome,' 'Slaves of the System,' 'The Gentle People.' Features are all quite good. I prefer 'A Letter from Mr. Sci-Fi' to 'Scientifilm Parade.' (Name of Mr. Ackerman's column in the old SPACEWAY), and I like your editorial very much. ... You need a letter column. ... Your artwork isn't too good...."

B. Roundtree, Windsor, Ont.

"I found all of the stories in this issue very interesting—but I usually wait until all parts of a serial have appeared before I read it. This time however. I started to read Radio Minds and can not wait until the rest is out. The best story, I think, is 'The Gentle People' and then 'Unwanted Heritage' comes a close second."

It is not our intention to print this many letters in each issue but, since all of these were so warm and friendly, we just couldn't resist. In future issues we will publish more complete but fewer letters. Please feel free to use these columns to discuss any subject of interest.



EXPLORING THE ASTEROIDS
(MORRIS SCOTT DOLLENS)



Our girl friend's an authority
On pets from outer spaces,
And a pet is what we'd like to be,
If with this one we'd change places!